THE Hudson REVIEW

JOSEPH FRANK:
Malraux: The Image of Man

HARRY MULISCH:
What Happened to Sergeant Masuro?—a story

W. D. SNODGRASS:
Gottfried Benn

BENJAMIN DE MOTT:
In and Out of Storytown

KATHERINE HOSKINS:
Conversation Pieces II

Poems by HUGH MACDIARMID AND ANNE SEXTON.

London Letter by DENIS DONOGHUE.

Articles and Reviews by RICHARD FOSTER, B. H. HAGGIN, DONALD HALL, NORMAN N. HOLLAND, ROGER SALE, JOHN SIMON, LOUIS SIMPSON, C. ROLAND WAGNER.

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The Hudson Review

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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th St., New York 22, N. Y. Subscription $4.00 per year in U. S. and Canada; foreign $4.50. Single copy, $1.25; U. S. distributor: B. de Boer, 102 Beverly Rd., Bloomfield, N. J. Business and subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright © 1961 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Registered U. S. Patent Office. Second Class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia. Indexed in The International Index. Publication office: 1407 Sherwood Ave., Richmond, Virginia.

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HUGH MAC DIARMID

The Kind of Poetry I Want

I dream of poems like the bread-knife
Which cuts three slices at once,
Of poems concerned with technical matters
(Poems braced by Carducci's "cold bath of erudition,"
As befits one of the new "*Gli Amici pedanti*"—
Knowing Sotomayor's essay[1] on poetic erudition too
And all the other manifestations
Of *cultismo* and *conceptista* through the ages,
Since of course everything depends on providing the
divining power
With the preparatory bath of practiced concentration
We roughly call "an interest in the subject to hand")
Which, as masterpieces of intricate lucidity
(The power to penetrate as with the lens of the X-ray
Into the interior and exterior of a solid
Free from the distortion of perspective)
Or in cut-gem clearness surpass even Huxley's
Prose account of the endophragmal system of the crayfish
And his Anatomy of the Vertebrata;
Crystal clear as Joule's first full exposition
—Given to a popular audience, a church-reading-room
audience,
Of no special knowledge—of the central doctrine
Of modern science, that of the Conservation of Energy; . . .

A poetry like Pushkin's in the morning sky of Russia,
Prédestiné, lumineux, et insolent de bonheur;
A poetry as when Pierrina Legnani
Walked on to the middle of the stage
And took an undisguised preparation.
The conductor, his baton raised, waited.
Then came a whole string of vertiginous pirouettes
Marvellous in their precision and brilliant as diamond facets.

[1] Luis Carillo y Sotomayor (1585-1620)

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Academically, such an exhibition of sheer acrobatics
Was inconsistent with purity of style,
But the feat as she performed it had something elemental
and heroic
In its breathless daring. It overwhelmed criticism.
Or like seeing Diaghileff at work
—I saw a Japanese performer once
Exhibiting feats of quadruple concentration.
I failed to be impressed by him.
I had seen Diaghileff at work.
And again, a poetry of which it may be said,
As of Plato's position in relation to the culture of the race,
That it is unique, and he owes it
Not to the closeness of his reasoning,
Not to the extent of his knowledge,
Not even to his great passion for truth,
Or any specially firm grasp of it,
But to the unparalleled fecundity of his thought,
That is, to the breadth and length of his view.
A poetry full of *cynghanedd*[2] and hair-trigger relationships,
With something about it that is plasmic,
Resilient, and in a way alarming—to make cry
"I touched something—and it was *alive*."
There is no such shock in touching what
Has never lived; the mineral world is vast.
It is mighty, rigid, and brittle. But the hand
That touches vital matter—though the man were blind—
Infallibly recognizes the feel of life, and recoils in
excitement. . . .
A poetry full of erudition, expertise, and ecstasy
—The acrobatics and the faceted fly-like vision,
The transparency choke-full of hair-pin bends,
"Jacinth work of subtlest jewellery," poetry *à quatre*
épingles—
(Till above every line we might imagine
A tensely flexible and complex curve
Representing the modulation,
Emphasis, and changing tone and tempo
Of the voice in reading;

[2] Term in Welsh prosody

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The curve varying from line to line
And the lines playing subtly against one another
—A fineness and profundity of organisation
Which is the condition of a variety great enough
To express all the world's,
As subtle and complete and tight
As the integration of the thousands of brush strokes
In a Cézanne canvas),
Alive as a bout of all-in wrestling,
With countless illustrations like my photograph of a
Mourning Dove
Taken at a speed of 1/75,000 of a second.
A poetry that speaks "of trees,
From the cedar tree that is in Lebanon
Even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall,"
And speaks also "of beasts and of fowl,
And of creeping things and of fishes,"
And needs, like Marya Sklodowska on her laboratory table,
For its open-eyed wonderment at the varied marvels of life,
Its insatiable curiosity about the mainspring,
Its appetite for the solution of problems,
Black fragments of pitch-blende from Saxony and Bohemia,
Greenish-blue chalcolite from Portugal and Tonkin,
Siskin-green uranium mica from France,
Canary-yellow veined carnotite from Utah,
Greenish-grey tjujamunite from Turkestan,
Pinkish-grey fergusonite from Norway,
Gold-tinted Australian monazite sand,
Greenish-black betafite from Madagascar,
And emerald-green tobernite from Indo-China,
And like my knowledge of, say, interlocking directorships
Which goes far beyond such earlier landmarks
As the Pujo Committee's report
Or Louis Stanley's "Spider Chart";
And everywhere without fear of Chestov's "suddenly,"
Never afraid to leap, and with the unanticipatedly
Limber florescence of fireworks as they expand
Into trees or bouquets with the abandon of "unbroke
horses". . . .

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In photographic language, "wide-angle" poems,
Taking in the whole which explains the part,
Scientifically accurate, full realized in all their details,
As Prudentius' picture of the gradually deputrefying Lazarus,
Or Baudelaire's of the naked mulatto woman,
Or Pope's most accurate particularities
In the Epistle to Lord Bathurst,
Or like a magic of grammar, a syntactical magic,
Of the relations of thought with thought whereby
By means of the syntax a whole world of ideas
Is miraculously concentrated into what is almost a point.
No mere passive hyperaesthesia to external impressions
Or exclusive absorption in a single sense,
But a many-sided active delight in the wholeness of things
And therefore, paradoxically perhaps,
A poetry like an operating theatre,
Sparkling with a swift, deft energy,
Energy quiet and contained and fearfully alert,
In which the poet exists only as a nurse during an operation,
Who only exists to have a sponge ready when called for,
Wads of sterilised cotton wool—nothing else
Having the smallest meaning for her.

A poetry not for those who do not love a gaping pig,
Or those made mad if they should behold a cat,
And least, those who, when the bagpipe sings i' the nose,
Cannot contain their urine.

The poetry of one the Russians call "a broad nature,"
And the Japanese call "flower heart,"
And we, in Scottish Gaeldom, "*ionraic.*"
The poetry of a man who practises his art
Not like a man who works that he may live
But as one who is bent on doing nothing but work,
Confident that he who lives does not work,
That one must die to life in order to be
Utterly a creator—refusing to sanction
The irresponsible lyricism in which sense impressions
Are employed to substitute ecstasy for information,

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Knowing that feeling, warm heart-felt feeling,
Is always banal and futile.
Only the irritations and icy ecstasies
Of the artist's corrupted nervous system
Are artistic—the very gift of style, of form and expression,
Is nothing else than this cool and fastidious attitude
Towards humanity. The artist is happiest
With an idea which can become
All emotion, and an emotion all idea.

A poetry that takes its polish from a conflict
Between discipline at its most strenuous
And feeling at its highest—wherein abrasive surfaces
Are turned upon one another like millstones,
And instead of generating chaos
Refine the grist of experience between them.
The terrific and sustained impact
Of intellect upon passion and passion upon intellect,
Of art as a vital principle in the process
Of devising forms to contain itself,
Of germinal forces directed,
Not upon a void or an ego,
But upon living materials, in a way
That becomes physically oppressive
To almost everybody,
Recalling the figure of Aschenbach, "whose greatest works
Were heaped up to greatness in layer upon layer,
In long days of work, out of hundreds
And hundreds of single inspirations."

A poetry that is—to use the terms of Red Dog—
High, low, jack, and the goddamn game!

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ANNE SEXTON

The Operation

1

After the sweet promise,
the summer's mild retreat
from mother's cancer, the winter months of her death,
I come to this white office, its sterile sheet,
its hard tablet, its stirrups, to hold my breath
while I, who must, allow the glove its oily rape,
to hear the almost mighty doctor over me equate
my ills with hers
and decide to operate.

It grew in her
as simply as a child would grow,
as simply as she housed me once, fat and female.
Always my most gentle house, before that embryo
of evil spread in her shelter and she grew frail.
Frail, we say, remembering fear, that face we wear
in the room of the special smells of dying, fear
where the snoring mouth gapes
and is not dear.

There was snow everywhere.
Each day I grueled through
its sloppy peak, its blue struck days, my boots
slapping into the hospital halls, past the retinue
of nurses at the desk, to murmur in cahoots
with hers outside her door, to enter with the outside
air stuck on my skin, to enter smelling her pride,
her upkeep, and to lie
as all who love have lied.

No reason to be afraid,
my almost mighty doctor reasons.
I nod, thinking that woman's dying

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must come in seasons,
thinking the bill must be paid,
thinking that living is worth buying.
I walk out, scuffing a raw leaf,
kicking the clumps of dead straw
that were this summer's lawn.
Automatically, I get in my car,
knowing the historic thief
is loose in my house
and must be set upon.

2

Clean of the body's hair,
I lie smooth from breast to leg.
All that was special, all that was rare
is common here. Fact: death too is in the egg.
Fact: the body is dumb, the body is meat.
And tomorrow the O.R. Only the summer was sweet.

The rooms down the hall are calling
all night long, while the night outside
sucks at the trees. I hear limbs falling
and see yellow eyes flick in the rain. Wide eyed
and still whole I turn in my bin like a shorn lamb.
A nurse's flashlight blinds me to see who I am.

The walls color in a wash
of daylight until the room takes its objects
into itself again. I smoke furtively and squash
the butt and hide it with my watch and other effects.
The halls bustle with legs. I smile at the nurse
who smiles for the morning shift. Day is worse.

Schedule late, I cannot drink
nor eat, except for yellow pills
and a jigger of water. I wait and think
until she brings two mysterious needles: the skills
she knows she knows, promising, soon you'll be out.
But nothing is sure. No one. I wait in doubt.

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I wait like a kennel of dogs
jumping against their fence. At ten
she returns, laughs and catalogues
my resistance to drugs. On the stretcher, citizen
and boss of my own body still, I glide down the halls
and rise in the iron cage toward science and pitfalls.

The great green people stand
over me; I roll on the table
under a terrible sun, following their command
to curl, head touching knee if I am able.
Next I am hung up like a saddle and they begin.
Pale as an angel I float out over my own skin.

I soar in hostile air
over the pure women in labor,
over the crowning heads of babies being born.
I plunge down the backstair
calling *mother* at the dying door,
to rush back to my own skin, tied where it was torn.
Its nerves pull like wires
snapping from the leg to the rib.
Strangers, their faces rolling like hoops, require
my arm. I am lifted into my aluminum crib.

3

Skull flat, here in my harness,
thick with shock, I call mother
to help myself, call toe of frog,
that woolly bat, that tongue of dog;
call God help and all the rest.
The soul that swam the furious water
sinks now in flies and the brain
flops like a docked fish and the eyes
are flat boat decks riding out the pain.

My nurses, those starchy ghosts,
hover over me for my lame hours
and my lame days. The mechanics

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of the body pump for their tricks.
I rest on their needles, am dosed
and snoring amid the orange flowers
and the eyes of visitors. I wear,
like some senile woman, a scarlet
candy package ribbon in my hair.

Four days from home I lurk on my
mechanical parapet with two pillows
at my elbows, as soft as praying cushions.
My knees work with the bed that runs
on power. I grumble to forget the lie
I ought to hear, but don't. God knows
I thought I'd die—but here I am,
recalling mother, the sound of her
good morning, the odor of orange and jam.

All's well, they say. They say I'm better.
I lounge in frills or, picturesque,
I wear bunny pink slippers in the hall.
I read a new book and shuffle past the desk
to mail the author my first fan letter.
Time now to pack this humpty dumpty
back the frightened way she came
and run along, Anne, and run along now,
my stomach laced up like a football
for the game.

All My Pretty Ones

Father, this year's jinx rides us apart
where you followed our mother to her cold slumber
a second shock boiling its stone to your heart,
leaving me here to shuffle and disencumber
you from the residence you could not afford:
a gold key, your half of a woolen mill,
twenty suits from Dunne's, an English Ford,

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the love and legal verbiage of another will,
boxes of pictures of people I do not know.
I touch their cardboard faces. They must go.

But the eyes, as thick as wood in this album,
hold me. I stop here, where a small boy
waits in a ruffled dress for someone to come . .
for this soldier who holds his bugle like a toy
or for this velvet lady who cannot smile.
Is this your father's father, this commodore
in a mailman suit? My father, time meanwhile
has made it unimportant who you are looking for.
I'll never know what these faces are all about.
I lock them into their book and throw them out.

This is the yellow scrapbook that you began
the year I was born; as crackling now and wrinkly
as tobacco leaves: clippings where Hoover outran
the Democrats, wiggling his dry finger at me
and Prohibition, news where The Hindenburg went
down and recent years where you went flush
on war. This year, solvent but sick, you meant
to marry that pretty widow in a one month rush.
But before you had that second chance, I cried
on your fat shoulder. Three days later you died.

These are the snapshots of marriage, stopped in places.
Side by side at the rail toward Nassau now;
here, with the winner's cup at the speedboat races,
here, by our kennel of dogs with their pink eyes,
running like show bred pigs in their chain-link pen,
here, at the horseshow where my sister wins a prize,
and here, standing like a duke among groups of men.
Now I fold you down, my drunkard, my navigator,
my first lost keeper, to love or look at later.

I hold a five year diary that my mother kept
for three years, telling all she does not say
of your alcoholic tendency. You overslept,
she writes. My God, father, each Christmas Day

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with your blood, will I drink down your glass
of wine? The diary of your hurly burly years
goes to my shelf to wait for my age to pass.
Only in this hoarded span will love persevere.
Whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you,
bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you.

Old Dwarf Heart

"True. All too true. I have never been at home in life. All my decay has taken place upon a child."
—*Henderson the Rain King.*

When I lie down to love,
old dwarf heart shakes her head.
Like an imbecile she was born old.
Her eyes wobble as thirty one thick folds
of skin open to glare at me on my flickering bed.
She knows the decay we're made of.

When hurt, she is abrupt.
Now she is solid, like fat,
breathing in loops like a green hen
in the dust. But if I dream of loving, then
my dreams are of snarling strangers. *She* dreams that . . .
strange, strange and corrupt.

Good God, the things she knows!
And worse, the sores she holds
in her hands, gathered in like a nest
from a ruined field. At her best
she is all red muscle, humming in and out, cajoled
by time. Where I go, she goes.

Oh now I lay me down to love,
how awkwardly her arms undo,
how patiently I untangle her wrists
like knots. Old ornament, old naked fist,
even if I put on seventy coats I could not cover you . . .
mother, father, I'm made of.

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Young

A thousand doors ago
when I was a lonely kid
in a big house with four
garages and it was summer
as long as I could remember,
I lay on the lawn at night,
clover wrinkling under me,
the wise stars bedding over me,
my mother's window a funnel
of yellow heat running out,
my father's window, half shut,
an eye where sleepers pass,
and the boards of the house
were smooth and white as wax
and probably a million leaves
sailed on their strange stalks
as the crickets ticked together
and I, in my brand new body,
which was not a woman's yet,
told the stars my questions
and thought God could really see
the heat and the painted light,
elbows, knees, dreams, goodnight.

I Remember

By the first of August
the invisible beetles began
to snore and the grass was
as tough as hemp and was
no color — no more than
the sand was a color and
we had worn our bare feet
bare since the twentieth
of June and there were times
we forgot to wind up your

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alarm clock and some nights
we took our gin warm and neat
from old jelly glasses while
the sun blew out of sight
like a red picture hat and
one day I tied my hair back
with a ribbon and you said
that I looked almost like
a puritan lady and what
I remember best is that
the door to your room was
the door to mine.

The Truth the Dead Know

for my mother, born March 1902, died March 1959
and my father, born February 1900, died June 1959

Gone, I say, and walk from church,
refusing the stiff procession to the grave,
letting the dead ride alone in the hearse.
It is June. I am tired of being brave.

We drive to The Cape. I cultivate
myself where the sun gutters from the sky,
where the sea swings in like an iron gate
and we touch. In another country people die.

My darling, the wind falls in like stones
from the whitehearted water and when we touch
we enter touch entirely. No one's alone.
Men kill for this, or as much.

And what of the dead? They lie without shoes
in their stone boats. They are more like stone
than the sea would be if it stopped. They refuse
to be blessed, throat, eye, and knucklebone.

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HARRY MULISCH

What Happened to Sergeant Masuro?

ON HER NETHERLANDS MAJESTY'S SERVICE
Ministry of War

To: Bureau O. Z.,
Section A, Room 3,
The Hague,
Holland.

Gentlemen,

It is a calm man who is writing this to you—a man with the calm that comes to the surface when hope has fled.

I suppose you know this tone. I do not know who you are, or under what Ministry you come, or what the initials of your name mean. I have never heard of your Bureau before. I should not be surprised if you also came under a Ministry I had never heard of before. Lieutenant-Colonel Stratema, Commanding Officer of the Fifth Battalion, 124th Regiment of Infantry, in New Guinea, gave me your address and told me I had to notify you of the affair of Sergeant Masuro "as if I was telling it to a friend."

Right . . . so you are my friend, Gentlemen. You shall hear what I know about it. I know *nothing* about it. I only know that it happened and that I was there. Incidentally, I have the impression that you have also received a report from the Colonel, and from Dr. Mondrian—and that they do not know anything about your Bureau either, except that, as I assume, it collects information about cases like Sergeant Masuro's.

There are other cases of the kind, are there, Gentlemen? I am not surprised. Only too many? Is that why I had to swear on the Bible to keep it secret? They also occur in Holland? I should not be surprised at that either. When Dr. Mondrian, at Kaukenau, had looked at Masuro till he could look no more, he began to interrogate me, with a drawn face, about our life in the interior.

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"God above, Lieutenant, it stands to reason, all that inhumanity round about you is more than human nature can endure."

I knew what he was thinking. He thought it had come of fear. Fear is capable of anything. It is a magician like Apollonius of Tyana, a prophet like Isaiah, a political mass-murderer, and a greater lover than Don Juan. But what happened to Masuro cannot have had anything to do with fear.

"I know the interior better than you do, Doctor. It could have happened just as easily in Amsterdam, in an office, or on a warm summer evening as he sat behind his paper near the open window, with the radio tuned in to Hilversum."

My panic, even then, was different from his—paler, more restrained, but not less violent. I told him that, in my opinion, it hardly had anything to do with *Masuro,* even. That it could happen to *anyone,* to him, Mondrian, as easily as to me—at any moment.

"Perhaps it's already at work in one of us, Doctor."

I saw that he could not take it. With a haggard face he looked at what was left of Masuro. He wanted a *reason*—otherwise, where was he? And the only thing that could pass for a reason, with a great deal of good (and occult) will, was fear. But there was no fear. Masuro hadn't known what fear was.

I knew Masuro well, in a manner of speaking. So I shall tell it you as if you were a friend, Gentlemen, although it's a mystery to me what you will do with the information when you have it.

Two years ago, when he was posted to my section at Potapègo, I happened to be standing jabbering to the village headman. The truck from Kaukenau arrived, and out of the cab stepped a swarthy, heavily built fellow with a big head, round eyes and thick lips. Then, suddenly, I saw his name in the Major's letter before me again.

"Harry Masuro!"

He came towards me grinning.

"Afternoon, sir. Who'd have thought you'd be boss over me one day, down on the planet's backside?"

I had met him for the first time in the dressing-room of the gymnasium, when I was eleven years old. He was in the sixth class of the elementary school; I was in the fifth. I came to fetch

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something I had forgotten. Masuro was sitting alone in the sweaty atmosphere of the poky room, immobile as an image among the dingy little heaps of clothes. From the gym came the sound of pupils exercising, and a voice of command counting up to four, over and over again.

"Aren't you allowed to join in?"

"I'm being punished."

"What for?"

He looked at me with his big brown eyes.

"For nothing."

Even then, he had that same appearance of something that was both heavy and sharply outlined. I felt he was not lying. I should have liked to become friends with him, but that was hardly possible with someone in a class lower or higher than one's own. Nowhere in the world is there such class consciousness as in schools; it is enough to turn communists green with envy. Occasionally I had a talk with him, and he came one evening to peer at the moons of Jupiter through my telescope.

"The universe is a great sack full of stones and light."

Two years later I went to secondary school, and sat in the same form with him; he had failed to pass up at the end of the year. But by then it was too late, the time for becoming friends was gone. Things like that often depend on a month or a week; perhaps even on a day or a minute. If I had met my wife a year later than I did our marriage would have been the happiest in the world, and I should not be here now, at Kaukenau in New Guinea.

We hardly ever talked to each other; a feeling of something like shame had come between us. He had few interests; and in those days broad rivers of biology and history were flowing through my head. But if I got to know one thing about him, it was that he was not afraid. And yet he was no braggart either. I never heard him say: "Dare you to do this!" or "Dare you to do that!"—and then perform some heroic stunt or other. That was only done by boys who were actually afraid of doing what they did, and, above all, afraid of being thought to be afraid. And that kind of fear, too, was lacking in Masuro. But when it came to doing something which really called for courage, we saw Masuro do it while we shat in our trousers. (As, for instance, when

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someone had to break into the headmaster's study in order to find out what was in the examination papers.) But in his case it was not courage, but the absence of fear. And it seemed as if that gave him a certain invulnerability. When he was punished, it was always for nothing—never for anything he *had* done.

Otherwise, he was a perfectly ordinary boy, Harry Masuro, cool as a cucumber and cheeky as the devil. If it should now appear otherwise, Gentlemen, it is because I am trying, perhaps rather too hard, to refute that fear theory of Dr. Mondrian's; and perhaps because, in spite of myself, I too am looking for a reason for what happened to him—a reason which is not there.

Another two years passed, and, shortly before the war, I lost sight of him. He left school and I heard that he had gone to the East Indies with his parents.

"Just so as to be shoved into a camp by the Japs," he told me at Potapègo, where we celebrated our reunion after fifteen years: I, a National-Service lieutenant, he a regular sergeant posted to my section.

By then, he had already seen eight years of tropical service. Once out of the internment camp he had immediately volunteered for the army. His father and mother had both died in camp. He had trodden the whole length of the Indonesian "Via Dolorosa": the defeat of the Japanese; the breakdown of the Linggajati agreement between the Dutch and the Republic; the police actions; punitive expeditions in Java and Sumatra . . . he also appeared to have had something to do with "Turk" Westerling's attempt at counter-revolution. Naturally, I did not ask further questions. It was all rather obscure and difficult to piece together. No doubt you have at your disposal better channels than I have, to help you to find out more about it.

You can, of course, search in that direction, but you will find nothing. That is to say, nothing *directly* bound up with what happened. I don't know . . . perhaps there are such things as "hidden connections"—it's quite possible; but if so, they are very subterranean, round-the-back, underhand, not to be found. Over the whole planet something indescribable is under way, a sort of process . . . even the sun shines differently now from before the war. I wouldn't know how to express it more clearly. Innumerable totally new, incomprehensible powers have come into play; a new kind of

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people . . . in Singapore, Prague, Amsterdam, Alamogordo, Jakarta (and The Hague), gentlemen of an entirely new kind sit round tables in cafes and government buildings; *they* are the powers. Two tables or rooms farther off, and nobody knows who they are. It has ceased to have anything to do with politics. A party of men drives through Borneo in a column of motor vehicles. What language do they speak? Nobody understands it. But it has *something to do with it.* Above Ceram a small, drab aircraft without distinguishing marks is shot down by an Indonesian battery. It is empty. Nor are there any cameras on board. Only radio apparatus for remote control; or was it a living creature? Everything has something to do with it. No one has got the hang of it as yet; no one understands what is going on, what is possible, where it will end; and anyone who may think that at home in Holland things are different, lives in a world which no longer exists, and is making a terrible mistake.

But Masuro was not afraid. In that unnamable process he had played his part—undoubtedly a small part, but a part that could not bear the light of day, a part played behind a lowered curtain, in a play that no one knows, and with nobody in the prompter's box. I could see that he looked upon service with me as a kind of holiday. He was right—so it was. So it *was!* I ask myself whether it still is, after what happened to him.

In any case, with my unit there was less reason for fear than anywhere else in the Archipelago. I am responsible for law and order in an area about as big as London. But the powers that beset us do not sit ensconced in the mountains or the jungles. Those poor Papuans . . . they wave our flag, and they build bungalows for us, what do they know? New Guinea is way back in the Pleistocene, 100,000 B.C. Only when one of my men shoots a cassowary or a cockatoo is a shot heard; otherwise never. Sometimes, between the lianas or on or in a stinking swamp, we discover Dutch subjects four feet six inches high, who have never seen a white man. Such a kraal we then christen Nieuw Emmercompascuum, just as British soldiers might christen it New Middle Wallop; or we give it a name derived from the metabolic processes: Cocksuckington, or Fuckshot. We have to do something. Provided there is law and order.

For the rest, wherever we come, law and order is at an end; then

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the air rings with shouts and curses in Dutch, with shots—and sometimes with blows, when I am not looking. We drive around in three jeeps and a truck full of food, petrol and ammunition. Often we are on the road for weeks at a stretch, in touch with Kaukenau by radio. It was right up Masuro's street; he was mad on hunting and shot the monkeys out of the trees from where he sat in the moving jeep. Naturally, I had more to do with him than with the other seven men; but also, in a way, less. Between us there was still something of that shamefacedness which we had had at secondary school on account of our neglected friendship. To him I talked about other things than to the others: about the past, about Holland, about nothing. Once he told me he had four children, two in Java, one in Celebes, and one in Halmahera.

When he was on guard duty at night, he hummed to himself between the tents, or on the verandas of the log huts which we had had built for us here and there by the Papuans. He liked keeping guard; he often let the next on duty sleep on, and he took his watch as well. It gave him a rest from something. His music was a great, gleaming, throbbing ball, which floated through the night between the tents. Hour after hour he hummed with a throat like an organ, and gazed at the mountains or at the black jungle, where everything rustled and murmured and screeched. Sometimes the Stone Age squatted down at a respectful distance from him, and listened absorbedly.

Everything went well for two years.

On the day that things went wrong, we were camping in Shitorbust, a hamlet of twenty huts full of dwarfs. That was Sunday a week ago, 19th July 1955. It was in May that we discovered it. It lies at the edge of the jungle, on the bank of the Titimuka river. We had not been able to make ourselves understood.

When I was about eighteen years old, Gentlemen—during the war—I wanted to become a Magus. I held my breath, tried to tie my legs in a knot, concentrated my attention on the patch made on the wall by a squashed mosquito, gazed at the bridge of people's noses and read books on "Personal Magnetism" and "Thought Power." From these I learned the exercise of recalling the events of the past day before going to sleep, and quickly running through them again, from the moment of waking onwards. That has since

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become a habit of mine. I am astonishingly clever at it. When I am not too tired I see the tiniest details again before me, and even such as had escaped my notice during the day. In a certain sense I live twice, and the second time more intensely than the first.

Gentlemen at The Hague, I have passed in review that day at Shitorbust, and the journey thither, not once but a dozen times. I remember every branch under which we drove, every stone in the foaming Titimuka, every cry from the black gnomes. I know that on that day, except for a spot of trouble with Private Steiger, *nothing* remarkable happened, *nothing* that made it different from the other days, and in any case *nothing* that had anything to do with Masuro.

Because it was pouring rain, we had been rather late in leaving our last camping-place, a hole called Umigapa. It was a shower from the mountains; when it stopped, we had half an hour of lovely weather, and at twelve o'clock the sun was beating down on our heads again. The troop was a bit browned off; we had been on the road for a fortnight, and I had promised that Shitorbust would be our last port of call. After that, it would be still another three or four days before we were back at Kaukenau. I sat in the second jeep, next to Private Elsemoor. Masuro was in the back, lounging across the seat with his carbine between his legs, and staring up at the tree tops. We didn't say much. I remember every word of what we said, but it was of no importance.

At about two o'clock I allowed Elsemoor to break column and drive off the road, to have a talk with a group of kapaukos who were dragging a dead kangaroo behind them to the swamps. At four o'clock we reached the Titimuka, and drove upstream on the narrow, shady strip of ground between the tropical forest and the water, half stupefied by the stench of rotting plants and leaves. Corporal Persin, in the first jeep, espied footprints in the mud, and five of us went for a short distance into the pitch-black jungle, but in vain. It was as dense and impenetrable as a city.

Otherwise, nothing happened. When we were bumping and jolting along the road again, Masuro turned once quickly on to his stomach and shot a crocodile to the bottom of the river. At half past six we drove into Shitorbust.

The Herr Geheimrat was already waiting to receive us, at the

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head of the whole tribe. He was the village chief, a naked little man hardly higher than my waist, with a civilized Mormon beard and wild eyes; to cover his privates he had a magnificent pointed calabash, which stood up as far as his nipples. He was growing bald at the temples, like an intellectual; I had told my men that the Germans call those patches of thinning hair "Geheimratsecken" ("Privy Councillor's corners"), and from then on he had his name. I suspect him of being the head of a gang of cannibals. "Manowe?" I had asked him the previous time, "Manowe?" His whole face lit up; it proved to be the only word he understood. With us, in any case, he had to make do with corned beef. He ate his fill at our welcoming banquet, together with two other village bigwigs; the representatives of our side were Masuro and I. The others were busy putting up the tents, while the village looked thoughtfully on.

During that meal, *nothing* happened that was out of the ordinary.

After eating, some of the men got their heads down under the mosquito curtains, while I made contact with Kaukenau and reported. Later, we went and lay in front of our tents, smoking and listening to the radio. Jakarta was broadcasting a lecture on Malayan poetry, but there was dance music on Sydney. Behind us and on the other side of the plashing river everything grew steadily taller and blacker and the darkness turned into millions of crickets. When it had become almost entirely dark, we lit the lamps, and saw that we were surrounded by motionless squatting dwarfs, listening to the music. Persin shouted at them, but they did not go away. When he fired his Sten gun off, they scattered into the night in all directions.

From now on I shall just report it verbatim, Gentlemen, then you'll be able to judge for yourselves.

"Where's Steiger?" I asked Masuro. During dinner I had seen him laughing and leering at a girl of about sixteen, with fine breasts and a belly as round as a ball.

"He's in love."

"Is he gone?"

"Yes."

"Did you *know?*"

"Yes."

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"It was your duty to tell me so, God damn. Call him."

"Steiger!" Masuro bellowed.

A few seconds passed. Then an answering shout came from somewhere behind the vehicles.

"Stick it back in your stinking pants and come here! Double!" Excuse me, Gentlemen, but that was what he said, and that was how I would tell it to a friend. He shouted quite good-humouredly, though. He was on holiday.

I began to get very worried. A moment later Steiger stood before me, sweating.

"At it again, Steiger?"

"Yes, sir. Thought you wouldn't notice it, sir."

"Where is that kid?"

"Run off, sir."

"Did anyone in the village see you go away with her?"

"No, sir. She was sitting by herself under the truck, listening to the music."

That was a load off my mind. But I was still seething.

"You kept your hand over her mouth, I suppose?"

"No sir. She wanted it."

"Hold your hands out."

He held out his hands. In the left one there were deep marks of teeth.

"I've . . . always had that, sir."

"From sucking your thumb, I suppose? Just stand like that for a while, and keep your hands out."

I let Steiger stand with his hands held out for a full quarter of an hour. No one said anything more. The music sounded softly through the rushing of the river. The insects clotted in a thick, crackling, dying layer round the lamps, so that the light was only half as strong. In the jungle on the other side something began to scream and abruptly stopped.

After a quarter of an hour had passed, I rubbed my thumb over Steiger's palm. The imprints were as good as gone.

"Double the guard tonight, Sergeant," I said to Masuro.

"Right, sir."

"Get to your wank-pit, Steiger, and report to the Captain when you get to Kaukenau. You knew what you were letting yourself in for?"

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"Yes, sir."

"Then bugger off."

I could do that sort of thing to Steiger—no one liked him much, except perhaps Masuro. When he had disappeared, and the others had turned to minding their own business again, Masuro came and sat down beside me, and smoked a fat cigar in silence.

"I know more or less what you're thinking," I said, after a while. "But you should have told me, all the same."

"Never done anything of the kind yourself, Lonestein?"

That was something new. For the first time in fifteen years he called me by my name; throughout the last two years I had been "sir" to him. It mollified me—probably I had greatly admired him formerly; and I suddenly started getting confidential.

"If I hadn't, I might perhaps have given him his head."

I could feel Masuro looking at me.

"You're used to the islands, Masuro," I said, "There they eat rice."

He continued to look at me. I stared at the other side of the river. A rustling noise came from the forest, followed by a soft rumble. A tree falling, after a thousand years.

"It happened to me somewhere on the Mimika; when I had just arrived here. A bit of stuff just like Steiger's. I hadn't had a nibble for three months. What did it matter—a kapauko bint right from the middle of the wilderness of a hundred thousand years ago . . . I held my hand over her mouth, but when I'd got halfway she bit into it, began to yell, and I had to let her go. When we came back a month later, she was no longer in the village." I looked into his eyes. "They had killed and eaten her."

You may as well know it, Gentlemen of Bureau O. Z. After what has happened to Masuro, I have no further interest in keeping secrets of that kind . . . if it comes to that (it suddenly occurs to me) perhaps your Bureau's job is not so much to investigate cases like Masuro's—which are not to be investigated—as to keep an eye on those who witnessed them. You're quite welcome to discharge me from the Service, Gentlemen. I'm no longer interested in that either.

But, to go on. Masuro asked: "How do you know that?"

I shrugged my shoulders and looked straight in front of me again.

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"They were manowes."

"She can just as easily have been ill, or married off to someone in another tribe, or simply dead."

"Maybe," I nodded. "But Steiger's going to pay for it."

The rustling and rumbling in the forest still went on—trees that collapsed under the burden that had come to hang on them, and dragged other trees down with them in a panic of breaking nests and crushed animals.

I did not know whether they had eaten her. In any case, it was possible. But it had never been possible for me to grasp that idea in all its implications, and to figure out what it would mean to me. (Slaughtering, cutting in pieces, cooking, spicing. . . .)

I looked at my watch. If I shut my eyes now, I can see the dial again: three minutes past nine. On the roof of the truck glowed the cigarette of Persin, who was on guard. From behind us came, once or twice, a clear sound that was like a tick and a sob at the same time. Masuro sat puffing at his cigar like a farmer after the day's work.

Nothing happened that was out of the ordinary.

I had the wireless switched off, Masuro posted the double guard, and gradually everyone went to sleep. Only Elsemoor was still about, sitting a little farther up the river bank with his feet in the water. Masuro was no talker, and I was in need of distraction.

"Be careful of the sand fleas, Elsemoor, or you'll be dancing tomorrow."

"I'm not touching the bottom, sir."

"He's thinking about his girl," said Masuro. "Perhaps at this moment she's being dragged behind the cars in Rotterdam."

"Care to come and sit with us, Elsemoor?"

"Thanks, sir."

Always that "sir." He came and sat down beside Masuro like a little boy shaking hands with the Queen.

"I suppose you were thinking about your girl?"

"No, sir, I haven't got a girl. I was thinking about school."

"About school? Did you know that the Sergeant and I sat together in the same form once?"

He looked at us reverently. I began to laugh, and offered him a cigarette.

"And school, then? *What* were you thinking about it?"

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"Nothing in particular," he said shyly. "As it happens . . . about country-conquering."

"Country-conquering?"

When he described it, I remembered it again. A game with knives. Each player gets a piece of a square of trodden-down sand. The players take it in turn to throw the knife into a neighbouring "country," and the part cut off from it in that way has been conquered, provided it adjoins the attacker's country. The player whose territory is no longer big enough to stand on has lost.

"What's the odds?" I said to Masuro. "Shall we go country-conquering, the three of us?"

Although, in various respects, I had an ascendancy over him (and not only because of my rank), in a way Masuro was always the boss: from the tone in which he said something, or did not say something, from a look in his eye, from the manner in which he now stood up and opened his pocket-knife. He had seen more of life than I had, and past experiences play a part in the slightest word and gesture. They are always weightier than innate powers of intelligence or character. Sometimes I felt diffident about giving him an order, and then I was amazed, and almost embarrassed, by the meticulousness with which he carried it out.

Like a conscientious lackey suffering somewhat under the whims of his masters, Elsemoor cut the plants out of the ground and prepared an immaculate arena. He must have been the sort of lad who couldn't make love if one corner of the carpet was turned up. In the meantime it had become pitch-black; the lamp shone like a planet and evoked against the edge of the forest a superghastly phantasmagoria of caverns, animal's heads, grottoes and enchantments of which none of us, with the best will in the world, could be frightened any more. (So much for Dr. Mondrian's theory.)

And now, Gentlemen, I have to treat you to a little report on a competition. After all, it's *data* you want, isn't it?

Masuro threw first, and cut off three quarters of my country at one stroke. Elsemoor gave the impression of being faced with a difficult dilemma. If he annexed territory from Masuro, extra guards might result; if he annexed any from me, cancellation of leave hung above his head. He confined himself to taking a small bite from the piece that Masuro had robbed from me, looking at

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me like an Italian as he did so. I had bad luck; my knife repeatedly fell flat on the ground, which mishap Elsemoor never failed to follow up with a sporting, sympathetic "Oh." Masuro planted his knife in the earth like a toreador, ate away everything round about us, and challenged us over and over again to prove that we were able to stand on our plots. But, blenching with fright, Elsemoor suddenly conquered almost all of his, so that Masuro had a job to maintain himself even on the toes of one foot.

I enjoyed myself enormously. Once Masuro nodded in the direction of the village, and I saw the shape of Herr Geheimrat. Quite alone, he squatted on the bank of the river and watched the white men stabbing his ground to death with knives and jollity. It put me off, and I called to Persin, ordering him to do something about it. Two shots rang out, and the headman was gone at once.

Masuro won again. Tacitly, Elsemoor and I ganged up against him, but suddenly Elsemoor fell out: after a brilliant throw on the part of Masuro, he suddenly had not a square centimetre left. With a gesture by which he acknowledged his master, and a sigh of relief, he went and sat down. I robbed Masuro of another small piece, and then he lifted his hand, holding his knife far behind his back, in order to eliminate me too in one throw.

But his arm remained immobile, and the knife dropped behind him with its point in the ground, outside the "country." His eyes grew bigger and bigger.

"I can't get my arm down," he said.

I stared at him. Above us I heard the deep buzzing of a hornbill as it flew over.

I thought I was dreaming. I went up to him and felt his right arm. There seemed no longer to be a joint in it.

"Sit down," I said.

Submissively, Masuro went and sat down on the countries right across all frontiers, with his arm in the air. Carefully I began to pull on it, and slowly he yielded to my pulling, as if he was keeping all his muscles tense. He had to support himself on the ground with his other arm.

"Pain?"

"No."

Elsemoor sat looking on, open-mouthed. At last the arm was down.

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"Can you move it?"

He moved it, arm and fingers; I saw that he had to make a tremendous effort to do so. Panickily he looked at it.

"Are you ever bothered by rheumatism in that arm?"

"No—never."

He was upset, so very upset that it astonished me. Suddenly he shouted at Elsemoor: "Why don't you try wearing another bloody mug on your head?"

I heard a note in his voice I had never heard before. It was no longer a holiday voice. Alarmed, Elsemoor sprang to his feet, saluted and made off.

"Go and kip down yourself," I said, Heaven knows why. "I'll do your guard for you."

I was surprised that he took it from me. (Yes, that was the silliest part about it: that he took it!) Without saying anything, he stood up and walked woodenly to our tent. His right arm hung stiffly down, but I saw that his left arm did not move either, and that his knees were as rigid as a cavalry officer's.

"It'll be gone by tomorrow," I added.

I may as well tell you, I write with little or no conviction. With what conviction can one write about an avalanche? One can talk with conviction about the *causes:* how it could have happened, what was done to prevent it. The avalanche itself is merely *brute,* insensate, something which is not our concern because we can't defend ourselves against it. And if we perceive that there were no causes, even? Then there is absolutely nothing left of us, Gentlemen in Room 3, *absolutely nothing.*

Masuro slept like a log all night, with his clothes on. I shared the last watch with Kranenburg, and we talked about the stars, but at the back of my mind I never stopped worrying about Masuro. In spite of Steiger everything remained quiet in the village.

When I shook Masuro awake at half past six, I was suddenly seized by something like a feeling of panic in my hands: *no human being was as heavy as that!* I pulled him up, I pulled a horse up, a rhinoceros, but the realization did not get any farther than my hands. With eyes as round as billiard balls he stood in the tent, tottering, like a robot, from one leg to the other. It was as if he

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did not see me. With stiff legs he tottered out to where the men stood washing, and blinked at the sun. The ground under my feet shook with the weight of his body. He raised his hand to his face as if it were a dumb-bell weighing a ton, belched and shut his eyes.

I felt as if my feet were in my head and my head was in my boots. For several long seconds I stared at his back. Suddenly it came home to me—how heavy he had been. *Impossibly* heavy. I began to swallow hard, a dozen times at least, and at last managed to get the words out:

"Sergeant . . . come into the tent a moment, will you, please."

He looked at me and tottered back. In the tent I stood and faced him; my hands were trembling.

"Listen, Masuro, you're ill, do you hear, you're ill. We're striking camp immediately and getting back to Kaukenau as quickly as possible."

He looked at me and said nothing.

"Do you understand me, Masuro?"

"Yes."

"We'll strike camp immediately."

I eyed him for a moment, and then left him standing there. Outside, I called the men together, and said as calmly as I could:

"Lads . . . the Sergeant's ill. Something wrong with his joints . . . and with his weight . . . I don't know what it is, but it's something pretty bad. If we manage to reach the valley before dark, we can drive through the night and be at Kaukenau tomorrow afternoon. We'll leave the whole mess as it is, and take the route via Ugei. We're leaving at once."

They ran to the tents and I remained where I was. I dared not go back to Masuro. I went to the wireless operator and quickly called up Kaukenau, and briefly told them that Masuro had been attacked by an unknown disease, and that we were on our way. I got the Captain; he was rather sceptical, and asked for further details, but I made the wireless op produce interference, and switched the transmitter off.

I knew it was not a disease. Growing heavier is no disease. I wanted to get to Kaukenau in order to be among people, as if I believed that such a thing could not subsist among people.

Ten minutes later we drove away. I had no more time to spare for Herr Geheimrat, and waved goodbye to him from my jeep.

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The entire tribe was present again, with children on backs and breasts. Herr Geheimrat nodded, holding on to his calabash with a grin.

I sat in the back; Masuro was in the front, next to Elsemoor. Masuro bolt upright, not turning his head a centimetre to left or right; Elsemoor at the steering-wheel with an expression on his face as if he were having to pass his driving-test. We did not speak. I dared not utter a word. All the time, I had to look at the back of Masuro's head; I was afraid as I had never been before, and nevertheless . . . nevertheless, I still could not take it in. I could not take in a hundredth part of it. Nor will that ever be possible. Just imagine, in Amsterdam, the statue of General Van Heutsz stepping down off his pedestal and starting to talk to you about the colonial war in Achin. You would never manage to take it in.

At noon I called a halt, so that we could eat something. While everyone was getting out, I walked sweating round to the front of the jeep, to look at Masuro. Small patches had appeared under his skin, all over his face.

"How do you feel now, Masuro?"

Glassily he looked into my eyes.

"I don't feel."

"Have you pain anywhere?"

He shook his head almost imperceptibly.

"Wouldn't you like to get out and stretch your legs?"

He closed his eyes.

"Just leave me alone."

Suddenly I seized him and shook him by the shoulders—an elephant, a three-ton truck.

"Masuro, what's the matter with you?"

He panted, and his teeth began to chatter.

My head spun. He did not want to eat either. I went and fetched something for myself from the truck, where the men were sitting on the ground among empty tins. They looked at me, but asked no questions. I got my ration and walked a short distance into the barren plain, where I sat down to eat. Empty and silent, the vehicles stood behind each other, looking as if they would stand like that for ever. In the second vehicle, the motionless body of Masuro. I tried to realize that something impossible was taking place, but

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I did not succeed, any more than I could imagine that the girl beside the Mimika had been eaten—while *that* was nevertheless within the realm of possibility. I looked at the sky. Something incomprehensible was busy about its evil work in Masuro.

We drove on, hour after hour, endlessly. I never took my eyes off Masuro: a massive neck, covered with black hair; a square head. I had taken his carbine and put it beside me. Was I afraid he might start shooting? We drove fast, and his body bounced up and down like a tree trunk on a lorry. I decided to go on to Fuckshot, where we had a bungalow and could cook a hot meal. It was a journey to the moon; my brain had long ceased to ponder on it, it wasn't a subject for brains, it was brute, brute, brute and impenetrable as a stone. We arrived at half past seven, and then it seemed as if the time had flown.

Cackling exuberantly, the village headman came up to our jeep, smacking his lips at the prospect of the welcoming feast. I got rid of him, saying that we had a case of serious illness with us. He edged away, walking backwards in fear; the whole tribe began to walk backwards.

I gritted my teeth and began to help Masuro out of the jeep. As soon as I touched him, I knew he had become a great deal heavier. The men looked on in silence. Slowly, very slowly we walked to the log hut. The steps of the little stair creaked and sagged under his weight. I pushed the door open; a fat toad scrambled away. With both my arms round him, I let him down on to one of the rude wooden chairs. It was quite impossible for him to bend his knees any more. When he sat down he fell through the chair, and hit the ground with a crash that made the whole place shake.

He began to cry.

"*Masuro. . . .*" I whispered.

I was at my wits' end. I ran to the still open door and began to shout that we had to go on at once, that there was no time for cooking. The men must have heard the crash; motionless they sat, half in and half out of the vehicles.

I knelt beside Masuro. He was sobbing like a child. Except for those specks on his face there was nothing out of the ordinary to be seen on him, but he must have weighed at least a quarter of a ton.

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"What's happening to me?" he blubbered.

"Oh Jesus Christ, Masuro, Jesus Christ, Masuro!"

I held him tight with both hands. Big tears trickled down his cheeks.

"What *is* happening to me, Lonestein? I'm getting stiffer and heavier all the time. What have I done?"

"Perhaps we'll be at Kaukenau by tomorrow morning, and then they'll give you treatment at once! In the hospital they're sure to. . . ." I could say no more. "Keep your pecker up, Masuro," I whispered. "Lie down."

He was done for, and he knew it, and I knew it. Docilely he let me lay him over backwards. I took him by his shoulders and began to push. It was like manhandling a railway truck along the rails. A sweet woody smell hung in the twilight of the hut. When I pushed too quickly his legs shot into the air with the weight of a piano. Suddenly I began to cry myself. Masuro looked up at me with big eyes.

"Surely it's impossible, that such a thing should happen . . .?" he said.

In despair, I shook my head.

"No, Masuro, it's impossible."

"I'm so tired."

He closed his eyes, his chest rose and fell laboriously. The patches on his face were more distinct than they had been in the afternoon; they were coming up everywhere under the skin, as if something was going to break through it. His hands were covered with them too. . . . To Kaukenau! To human beings!

"I can hardly get my breath any more," he groaned. "It's just as if there's a Roman sitting on my chest."

God in Heaven, I thought, help Masuro. He has done nothing. He has grown so heavy that he falls through his chair. There's a Roman sitting on his chest.

But I would sooner have shot him, and buried him on the spot, as deep as I could. Persin, Elsemoor, Steiger, Kranenburg—they would all have kept as quiet as the grave, that much is certain. They would have let him disappear from their thoughts like a splinter from their flesh.

And now you're licking your lips and settling yourselves back in your chairs, aren't you, Gentlemen of Section A? Now for the

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revelations, you think. Whispered between sobs, into my ear! They didn't come. No admissions. No confession. Nothing. He only lay crying on the floor, getting heavier and heavier, and didn't know what was happening to him. Nor did his spirit go forth from him, winging up into the blue in stately flight—anything but! What is the spirit? Sometimes a Napoleon, whose dream externalizes itself and floods all Europe, and, when it slowly retreats, leaves behind it tangible tokens over the entire continent: palaces, obelisks, triumphal arches, corpses, legal systems, Holy Alliances and, in Holland, surnames—Jan Pieter's son becomes Jan Lonestein, and so forth. But generally the spirit is a hat we wear on our heads against the draught; when we meet a woman, we politely take it off.

Kranenburg came timidly in with one or two tins in his hands. Masuro still did not want to eat anything; and I knew that I should not be able to get anything down my throat either. I had the tins put in the jeep, and called Corporal Persin. When he appeared in the doorway and looked into my eyes, I knew that *he* would have made sure no one said anything if I had killed Masuro.

"Give me a hand with the Sergeant, will you, Persin. Then we'll go on."

For a second or two he did not move; then he came. Neither of us was a milksop, but this was too much. With trembling lips Masuro looked at our faces, growing red with exertion. Gasping, out of breath, we finally succeeded in getting him upright. Then he fell through the floor, between us, with an ear-splitting crash. From down by our knees he began to scream, with a sound such as the jungle had never heard before—smaller than a pygmy, he was, with the splintered planks round his waist. A moment later Persin brought the butt of his revolver down on the crown of the screaming head. Suddenly all was still; the head did not fall over.

Beside myself, I looked at Persin. God, Gentlemen! It was as if I had made an endless journey through France, Burgundy, Trèves, Cluny, in the few seconds that the screaming lasted. A vision, a fantastic vision that had nothing whatsoever to do with the case, unless it was via the Lord alone knew what subterranean connections! I saw a vast crowd in the square of Rheims, at the

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foot of the Cathedral, exulting in the execution of a tall fair-haired man in a violet mantle embroidered with gold, while trumpeters with gaudy emblems on their breasts blew the azure air infinitely high and empty. I saw a Pope amid a small retinue travelling over the Alps to Germany, and in the north a king, with his family, was stumbling through the snow to meet him, on bare feet—and above the head of the Pope hovered his voice and said: "Thou, Hildebrand, Pope no more, but recreant monk! I, Henry, King by the Grace of God, with all my Bishops I say unto you: descend from the throne, descend from the throne, Thou, accursed through all the ages!" And at Loches I saw how a French king, weeping and wringing his hands, had the forest cut down in which the news of his little son's death had reached him. Kings, kings, narrow streets tapering to a point, full of the clang of iron on iron, iron on copper, bronze on silver; the churches full of rotting and moaning beggars; trumpets, and mounted knights with pieces of meat between their teeth, in dense russet-brown crowds of the common people. I saw that that entire land of Europe looked different from now, more fairy-tale-like, warmer, olive-green, with bizarre mouse-grey rocks which sprouted out of the ground between the houses, waxed larger and shrivelled up; slight trees grew, slender and delicately feathered, heathen gods with bows in their hands toppled from their pedestals, and sometimes a grey-headed man walked the same road, three times, always a dozen yards at a time, without seeing himself. The third time he met Jesus. I constantly saw the backs of cripples, bent between their crutches, disappearing behind a hill on their way to the city. And everywhere, everywhere had been built over; behind an olive-green forest eight deserted skyscrapers towered up. There was not only another time but another *dimension* in Masuro's screaming—impossible to regain. There were rocks there which are no more, without a geological reason for it.

The vision must have arisen from the very marrow of my bones. I felt as if I had died. New Guinea. I looked from Persin back to Masuro. With two more men to help us we pulled him out of the floor and carried him in silence to the truck. Fifty yards away the kapaukos stood huddled together, jumping and barking like monkeys. They must have heard the screaming—but perhaps they

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had got wind of something else, something for which they had an organ of reception that made them jump and bark in panic in an unknown world.

Friend, we know as little about life as a new-born baby knows about a woman. If we happen to turn around and glimpse a little more of it, our knees turn to water.

That night I sat in the pitch-black truck beside Masuro—a looming block of darkness in a world of roaring engines. I could have made a light, but something kept me from doing so. (What? Paracelsus' fur cap. The sun of Austerlitz.) Masuro grew so heavy that his body no longer bounced as we rode over a stone or through a rut; I heard nothing more. I sat on my haunches against the back of the cab and was slung to and fro. My eyes had glided from their sockets and hung in all the corners, and themselves became darkness.

Masuro spoke once more, for the last time; perhaps he had long been conscious.

"Lonestein? . . . are you there? . . . just lay me down in the open, and they can break their teeth on me."

It was the darkness that spoke, with a voice as if through a telephone, without depth, one-dimensional. I made no answer. It was all over with him—and with me too. Or was it perhaps only just beginning? A new kind of human being. . . . For the future: calm without hope, prepared for anything. I was in the utter darkness of the truck; I thought of nothing; that night the darkness became my body.

The rest you know. The following morning, when Dr. Mondrian tried to stick his lancet into Masuro for the post-mortem (on the floor: the operating-table would not have supported him), the point broke off. What was left of the skin he scratched away—a dry, leathery membrane. Masuro had turned to stone. From top to toe, inside and out. A sort of granite, pale grey to pink, with black specks and streaks that looked like letters. He was sawn apart in a native stone quarry; a grain of grit flew into my eye, so that the tears ran down my cheeks for hours. Everyone, officers, doctors, crowded round the two halves of Masuro. The fresh section shone with a blue sheen. His entrails had been preserved in the stone like rare fossils.

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"Atrocities?" Dr. Mondrian asked me, with dry lips.

How well I understood the man!

"Not under my command."

"But earlier perhaps? In '48 . . . in Celebes?"

"Turned to stone from cruelty, Doctor? Which of us would still be of flesh?"

"Not from cruelty—from remorse. A kind of process . . . a remorse which has remained below the threshold of consciousness. A certain secretion which has arisen, chemical conversions, a kind of petrifying exudation. . . ."

"Is that scientifically feasible, Dr. Mondrian?"

It was as if he grew a pointed beard; I could smell the plush of the Viennese couch:

"Everything is possible! Science knows nothing, absolutely nothing, of the region in which spirit and body communicate! A no man's land. A region as big as . . . as the whole of New Guinea! We know nothing about it, nothing."

But he was wrong. Four has long ceased to be twice two. Out in the street, the traffic rolls by. A woman finds her husband fallen through his chair at the window, changed into a stone image. In the towns the jungle becomes more and more dense, and the air is emptier than ever. Here and there, the prints of human feet are to be seen in the earth, but in the void above, the wind blows.

I cancelled the charge against Steiger.

Lieutenant K. Lonestein, No. 121370,
Section G III, 5th Battalion,
124th Regiment of Infantry.

Kaukenau,
New Guinea.
26th July 1955.

[*Translated from the Dutch by Roy Edwards*]

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JOSEPH FRANK

André Malraux: The Image of Man

WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE NOT CHOSEN TO BE BORN, that we will not choose to die. That we have not chosen our parents. That we can do nothing against time. That between each of us and universal life there is . . . a sort of gulf. When I say that each man experiences deep within himself the presence of destiny, I mean that he experiences—and almost always tragically, at least for certain moments—the world's indifference *vis-à-vis* himself."

These lines are from André Malraux's last novel, *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* (1943), and they go a long way to explain why, of all the French writers famous before the second World War, Malraux is one of the few to whom the younger generation still pays homage. Better than any other figure of his epoch, Malraux anticipated and crystallized the post-war Existentialist atmosphere that has become associated with the names of Sartre and Camus. Man's irremediable solitude: his absurd but unquenchable longing to triumph over time: his obligation to assume the burden of freedom by staking his life for his values: his defiance of death as an ultimate affirmation of "authentic" existence—all these Existentialist themes were given unforgettable artistic expression by Malraux long before they became fashionable intellectual catchwords or tedious artistic platitudes. Indeed, the genesis of French Existentialism as a full-fledged cultural movement probably owes more to Malraux than to Heidegger or Jaspers, Berdyaev or Chestov. For it was Malraux, through his novels, who shaped the sensibilities which then seized on doctrinal Existentialism as an ideological prop.

André Malraux has thus taken on the status of a prophetic precursor in contemporary French literature; and at the same time the essential contours of his own work have begun to stand out in much clearer relief. Up to the beginning of the second World War, Malraux was the radiant symbol of the free liberal intellectual who had dedicated his life to the Communist Revolution and the

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struggle against Fascism, and the focus of critical interest in his novels was their political content. But the Communists were never too happy about Malraux as an ally—and with good reason. For Malraux's heroes were never simply engaged in a battle against a particular social or economic injustice; they were always somehow struggling against the limitations of life itself and the humiliation of destiny. Communist critics were never loth to advise Malraux to shed his "romanticism," i.e., his Pascalian awareness of *la condition humaine;* but while this was unquestionably good advice for a political commissar, it would have been death to Malraux the artist. For what makes *Man's Fate* the greatest of all novels inspired by revolution, what gives it a poetic resonance invulnerable to changing political fashions, is precisely that Malraux was able to experience the revolution in terms of man's immemorial longing for communion in the face of death.

But if Existentialism has now allowed us to see Malraux's work in a juster perspective, it also carries with it a new danger of misunderstanding. This danger consists in reading into Malraux's work the fixities of later doctrine, and overlooking the extent to which, from his very first serious book in 1926 *(La Tentation de l'Occident),* Malraux has been driven by the need to transcend the dilemmas of claustrophobic egoism and the anguish of rootless liberty which Sartre has absolutized into ontological categories of human existence. It was this need which originally impelled Malraux toward Communism, and, when the latter displayed its determination to mutilate the total "quality of man," has now led him to search for a human communion in other realms of experience. The latest French book on Malraux, Jeanne Delhomme's dizzyingly dialectical and impressively intelligent philosophical study, *Temps et Destin,*[1] attempts to force Malraux's work into a system of categories derived from Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre (with a dash of Bergson to boot); but while such categories are applicable to isolated characters and moments in Malraux's novels, they are entirely misleading when used to interpret Malraux's dominating artistic impulse as a whole. This is particularly true for the latest phase of Malraux's evolution, which comprises *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* and the great series of works on art and esthetics which have continued to appear

[1] Jeanne Delhomme, *Temps et Destin, éssai sur André Malraux* (Gallimard, 1955).

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since the end of the second World War. For here if anywhere in contemporary literature is a major effort to counterbalance Existentialism and restore some of its former lustre to the tarnished image of the species Man, or, as Malraux himself puts it, "to make men conscious of the grandeur they ignore in themselves."

I

André Malraux's *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* was written in the early years of the second World War, during a period of enforced leisure when he was taken prisoner by the Germans after the fall of France. The manuscript, presumably after being smuggled out of the country, was published in Switzerland in 1943. The work as it stands is not the entire book that Malraux wrote at that time—it is only the first section of a three-part novel called *La Lutte avec l'Ange;* and this first section was somehow preserved (there are always these annoying little mysteries about the actual facts of Malraux's life) when the Gestapo destroyed the rest. If we are to believe the list of titles printed in Malraux's latest book, *La Métamorphose des Dieux,* Vol. I (1957), he is still engaged in writing a large novel under his original title. But as he remarks in his preface to *The Walnut Trees,* "a novel can hardly ever be rewritten," and "when this one appears in its final form, the form of the first part . . . will no doubt be radically changed." Malraux pretends, perhaps with a trifle too self-conscious a modesty, that his fragmentary work will accordingly "appeal only to the curiosity of bibliophiles" and "to connoisseurs of what might have been." Even in its present form, however, the first part of Malraux's unrecoverable novel is among the greatest works of mid-twentieth century literature; and it should be far better known than it is.[2]

The theme of *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* is most closely related to its immediate predecessor in Malraux's array of novels: *Man's Hope* (1937). This magnificent but greatly underestimated book, which bodies forth the very form and pressure of its time as no other comparable creation, has suffered severely from having

[2] One of the minor mysteries of American publishing is why Malraux's novel should still not have appeared in this country seventeen years after it came out in French. A translation was published in Great Britain (John Lehmann, 1952), but this is so riddled with errors that the book hardly makes any sense. I have, however, used this translation as a basis for some of my quotations, with appropriate corrections.

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been written about an historical event—the Spanish Civil War—that is still capable of fanning the smoldering fires of old political feuds. Even so apparently impartial a critic as W. H. Frohock has taken for granted that the book was originally intended as a piece of Loyalist propaganda; and has then gone on to argue, with unimpeachable consistency, that all the obviously non-propagandistic aspects of the book are simply inadvertent "contradictions."[3]

Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. The whole purpose of *Man's Hope* is to portray the tragic dialectic between means and ends inherent in all organized political violence—and even when such violence is a necessary and legitimate self-defense of liberty, justice and human dignity. Nowhere before in Malraux's pages have we met such impassioned defenders of a "quality of man" which transcends the realm of politics and even the realm of action altogether—both the action of Malraux's early anarchist-adventurers like Perken and Garine, and the self-sacrificing action of dedicated Communists like Kyo Gisors and Katow in *Man's Fate*. "Man engages only a small part of himself in an action" says old Alvear the art-historian; "and the more the action claims to be total, the smaller is the part of man engaged." These lines never cease to haunt the book amidst all the exaltations of combat, and to make an appeal for a larger and more elemental human community than one based on the brutal necessities of war.

It is this larger theme of the "quality of man," a quality that transcends the ideological and flows into "the human," which now forms the pulsating heart of Malraux's artistic universe. Malraux, to be sure, does not abandon the world of violence, combat and sudden death which has become his hallmark as a creative artist, and which is the only world, apparently, in which his imagination can flame into life. *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* includes not one war but two, and throws in a Turkish revolution along with some guerrilla fighting in the desert for good measure. But while war still serves as a catalyst for the values that Malraux wishes to express, these values are no longer linked with the triumph or defeat of any cause—whether that of an individual assertion of the will-to-power, or a collective attempt to escape from the humiliation of oppression—as their necessary condition. On the con-

[3] See Frohock's useful study, *André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination* (Stanford University Press, 1952), pp. 104-125.

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trary, the frenzy and furor of combat is only the sombre foil against which the sudden illuminations of the human flash forth with the piercing radiance of a Caravaggio.

II

The Walnut Trees of Altenburg is composed in the form of a triptych, with the two small side panels framing and enclosing the main central episode of the novel. This central episode consists of a series of staccato scenes set in the period from the beginning of the present century up to the first World War. The framing scenes, on the other hand, both take place in the late Spring of 1940, just at the moment of the defeat of France in the second great world conflict. The narrator is an Alsatian serving with the French Army, and he has the same name (Berger) that Malraux himself was later to use in the Resistance; like Malraux he was also serving in the tank corps before being captured, and we learn as well that in civilian life he had been a writer. These biographical analogies are obvious, and far too much time has been spent speculating on their possible implications.

Much more important is to grasp the feelings of the narrator (whose full name is never given) as he becomes aware of the disorganized and bewildered mass of French prisoners clustered together in a temporary prison camp in and around the cathedral of Chartres. For as his companions gradually dissolve back into a state of primitive confrontation with elemental necessity, as they lose all the appanage of their acquired culture, he is overcome by the feeling that he is at last being confronted with the essence of mankind. "As a writer, by what have I been obsessed these last ten years, if not by mankind? Here I am face to face with the primeval stuff."

The intuition about mankind conveyed in these opening pages is of crucial importance for understanding the remainder of the text; and we must attend to it more closely than has usually been done. What does the narrator see and what does he feel? A good many pages of the first section are taken up with an account of the dogged determination of the prisoners to write to their wives and families—even when it becomes clear that the Germans are simply allowing the letters to blow away in the wind. Awkwardly

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and laboriously, in stiff, unemotional phrases, the soldiers continue to bridge the distance between themselves and those they love; they instinctively struggle to keep open a road to the future in their hearts. And by a skillful and unobtrusive use of imagery (the enclosure is called a "Roman-camp stockade," the hastily erected lean-to is a "Babylonian hovel," the men begin to look like "Peruvian mummies" and to acquire "Gothic faces"), Malraux projects a fresco of human endurance—which is also the endurance of the human—stretching backward into the dark abyss of time. The narrator feels himself catching a glimpse of pre-history, learning of man's "age-old familiarity with misfortune," as well as his "equally age-old ingenuity, his secret faith in endurance, however crammed with catastrophes, the same faith perhaps as the cave-men used to have in the face of famine."

This new vision of man that the narrator acquires is also accompanied by a re-vision of his previous view. "I thought I knew more than my education had taught me" notes the narrator, "because I had encountered the militant mobs of a political or religious faith." Is this not Malraux himself alluding to his own earlier infatuation with the ideological? But now he knows "that an intellectual is not only a man to whom books are necessary, he is any man whose reasoning, however elementary it may be, affects and directs his life." From this point of view the "militant mobs" of the past, stirred into action by one ideology or another, were all composed of "intellectuals"—and this is not the level on which the essence of mankind can be discovered. The men around him, observes the narrator, "have been living from day to day for thousands of years." The human is deeper than a mass ideology, certainly deeper than the isolated individual; and the narrator recalls the words of his father, Vincent Berger: "It is not by any amount of scratching at the individual that one finally comes down to mankind."

The entire middle section of *The Walnut Trees* is taken up with the life of Vincent Berger himself, whose fragmentary notes on his "encounters with mankind" are now conveyed by his son. "He was not much older than myself" writes the narrator, "when he began to feel the impact of that human mystery which now obsesses me, and which makes me begin, perhaps, to understand him." For the figure of Vincent Berger Malraux has obviously

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drawn on his studies of T. E. Lawrence (though Berger fights on the side of the Turks instead of against them), and like both Lawrence and Malraux himself he is a fervent admirer of Nietzsche. A professor at the University of Constantinople, where his first course of lectures was on Nietzsche and the "philosophy of action," Vincent Berger becomes head of the propaganda department of the German Embassy in Turkey. As an Alsatian before the first World War he was of course of German nationality; but he quickly involves himself in the Young Turk revolutionary movement to such an extent that his own country begins to doubt his patriotism. And, after becoming the right-hand man of Enver Pasha, he is sent by the latter to pave the way for a new Turkish Empire embracing "the union of all Turks throughout Central Asia from Adrianople to the Chinese oases on the Silk Trade Route."

Vincent Berger's mission is a failure because the Ottoman nationalism on which Enver Pasha counted does not exist. Central Asia is sunk in a somnolence from which nothing can awaken it; and amid a dusty desolation in which nothing human any longer seemed to survive, Vincent Berger begins to dream of the Occident. "Oh for the green of Europe! Trains whistling in the night, the rattle and clatter of cabs. . . ." Finally, after almost being beaten to death by a madman—he could not fight back because madmen are sacred to Islam—he throws up his mission and returns to Europe. This has been his first encounter with mankind, and, although he has now become a legendary figure in the popular European press, it leaves him profoundly dissatisfied. Despite Berger's report, Enver Pasha refuses to surrender his dream of a Turkish Blood Alliance; and Vincent Berger learns that political ambition is more apt to hide than to reveal the truth about men. But as he discovers shortly, on returning among intellectuals obsessed by *le culte du moi,* his experience of action had also taught him a more positive lesson. "For six years my father had had to do too much commanding and convincing" writes the narrator, "not to understand that man begins with 'the other.' "

And when Vincent Berger returns to Europe, this first result of his encounters with mankind is considerably enriched and deepened by a crucial revelation. For a dawning sense of illumination occurs in consequence of two events which, as so often in

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Malraux, suddenly confront a character with the existential question of the nature and value of human life. One such event is the landing in Europe itself, when the mingled familiarity and strangeness of the Occident, after the blank immensities of Asia, shocks the returning traveller into a realization of the infinite *possibilities* of human life. Significantly, Malraux compares this shock to that undergone by a man who has just committed murder. "This evening he [Vincent Berger] felt released . . . with a poignant liberty indistinguishable from licence." The other event is the suicide of Vincent's father five days after his landing and just two days after a conversation in which Dietrich Berger had said: "Well, you know, *whatever happens,* if I had to live another life again, I should want none other than Dietrich Berger's."

Both these events pierce through the thin film of the quotidian, the horizontal surface on which most of human life is spent, and disclose the vertical depths of the contingency of human existence and the anguish of human liberty. This anguish of liberty is a familiar phenomenon to all readers of Malraux—it possesses Malraux's adventurers, as well as the terrorist Tchen in *Man's Fate*—and always, in the past, it had resulted in a release that was equivalent to a condemnation. The answer to this anguish had always been a paroxysm of the will-to-power: a convulsive attempt of human liberty, freed of all attachments, to prove its own autonomy by an impossible duel with the power of inhuman fatality. But the release that now occurs in Vincent Berger is of an entirely different order:

> The human adventure, the world. And all of it, like his father's fulfilled destiny, could have been other than it was. He felt himself gradually possessed by an unknown sensation, as he had once been at night in the highlands of Asia by the presence of the sacred, while around him the velvet wings of the little desert owls fluttered in silence. It was the same agonizing sense of freedom, only far more pronounced, that he had felt that evening at Marseilles watching the shadows glide in the faint odor of cigarettes and absinthe—when Europe had seemed so unfamiliar, when he had watched it as if, liberated from time, he would have watched an hour of the distant past slip slowly by with all its strange retinue. In the same way, he now felt the whole of his life becoming strange; and suddenly he felt delivered—mysteriously a stranger to the earth and astonished by it, as he had been by that street where the people of his rediscovered race slid by in the greenish twilight. . . ."

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The experience of the contingency of existence thus leads Vincent Berger to an intuition of "the sacred." But the category of the religious—as we have learned from Kierkegaard, and as we could have learned even earlier from Job—transcends the category of the social or ethical; and in this sense Perken, Garine and Tchen had also been initiated into the mystery of "the sacred." But the sacred is no longer the equivalent of the demonic (also a religious category); nor is it, as in Asia, a sense of the nothingness of man before the awfulness of the infinite (the desert is monotheistic, as Renan remarked in a once-famous phrase). Rather, "the sacred" is now for Malraux an intuition of the infinite mystery of human liberty, of a world and a life which "could have been other than it was" and which, in being what it is, testifies to the existence of a human essence that endures and persists underneath the equally infinite vicissitudes of time and history. Vincent Berger's "agonizing sense of freedom" is, as it were, only the coming-to-consciousness of the freedom which exists as an inchoate but irreducible and immortal possibility at the center of human life itself. And this is the intuition of "the sacred" in man that Vincent Berger defends in the famous colloquy at the old abbey at Altenburg.

III

This debate is certainly one of the most brilliant scenes of its kind in contemporary fiction. Nothing is more difficult than to dramatize serious intellectual discussion successfully; and Malraux does so with an aphoristic intensity and an emotional vibrancy that can only be matched in the very best pages of Thomas Mann. Indeed, Malraux's formulations are so striking and so luminous that they have provided an irresistible temptation for critics to overstress their importance.

W. H. Frohock has maintained, in a view which is generally accepted, that Vincent Berger is "rationally" defeated by the Spenglerian arguments of the ethnologist Mollberg; and that at the end of this sequence he can only fall back on an "irrational" vision of the walnut trees of Altenburg to establish his faith in an essence of man.[4] But such an interpretation is inadmissible for

[4] Frohock, *André Malraux*, p. 132.

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a number of reasons. For one thing, Malraux is too well acquainted with Spengler, who prided himself precisely on his "intuitive" view of history, to identify Spengler's position with any kind of "rationalism." For another, it is perfectly clear in the novel that Mollberg's views spring from the same existential level as Vincent Berger's but reflect a temperament and an outlook that leads to despair instead of to a grave and sober exaltation. And on this level, the refutation of Mollberg already has been given both in the opening pages of the book and in Vincent Berger's intuition of "the sacred."

"Is there something given on which we can base the notion of man?" This is the issue at stake in the great debate as it is formulated by Vincent's uncle, Walter Berger, the famous intellectual impresario who orchestrates the colloquies at Altenburg. The first answer proposed is that man's essence can be founded on the creation of "culture," that is, on great works of art, the gift of individual genius to mankind, which free us "from the bonds of space, time and death." This "subtly banal" view, however, is rejected by Edmé Thirard, who sounds a good deal like the great literary critic Albert Thibaudet, and whose words receive the silent approval of Vincent Berger. "Culture," Thirard asserts, "doesn't teach us about man, it merely teaches us about the cultured man, in proportion to the degree of his culture." The religion of culture, in other words, isolates culture from the roots of life and fails to make contact with "the commonplace human misery . . . in hospitals, in maternity wards, and in the rooms of the dying."

The next answer suggested is that we can get at the essence of man by psychology, that is, by "scratching at the individual" in search of his "secrets." Vincent Berger's experience of "the other" has already implicitly rejected this answer according to the artistic logic of the novel; and now, intervening directly in the argument, he attacks the emphasis on psychology as Occidental cultural chauvinism, a consequence of the influence of Christianity on the Western psyche. "It's our old struggle against the Devil . . . which makes us confuse our knowledge of man with our knowledge of his secrets." The mystery of man is precisely that no "secrets" can ever explain his inviolable freedom. And when Thirard remarks that our "knowledge" of man is always dubious because "we can

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hardly ever foresee the really important actions of those nearest to us," the figure of Dietrich Berger rises before Vincent's eyes as a vital confirmation of this assertion. This is the manner in which, underneath the glittering swordplay of ratiocination, Malraux constantly appeals to the deeper level of experience portrayed elsewhere in the book; and unless we situate the ideas in this framework, we can hardly understand either the underlying movement of the discussion or the nature of its resolution.

In place of man as the creator of "culture," or as the repository of "secrets" which, once brought to light, would eliminate the mystery of freedom, Vincent Berger proposes another image of man: as eternally engaged in a struggle with destiny, as eternally striving—and succeeding—in transforming fate into freedom. Here again art is invoked as evidence just as in the thesis about "culture"; but it is very important to grasp Malraux's distinction (not, it must be admitted, made very clearly) between the two. Art is no longer a miraculous gift of individual genius to mankind which *creates* a freedom from destiny; now it is only a symbol that *expresses* man's collective and eternal struggle to transcend the conditions of his servitude:

> To me [Vincent Berger says] our art seems to be a rectification of the world, a means of escaping from man's estate. The chief confusion, I think, is due to our belief—and in the theories propounded of Greek tragedy, it's strikingly clear—that representing fatality is the same as submitting to it. But it's not, it's almost to dominate it. The mere fact of being able to represent it, conceive it, release it from real fate, from the merciless divine scale, reduces it to the human scale. Fundamentally, our art is a humanization of the world.

It is this "humanization of the world"—a humanization that stems from the assertion of human liberty in the face of destiny—that Vincent Berger has already felt in his intuition of "the sacred"; and the validity of this intuition is denied by Mollberg in the speech that follows.

Mollberg's presence in the book is far from being merely that of a disembodied voice grinding out a string of irrefutable arguments; and perhaps if critics had paid a bit more attention to his human contours, they would have been able to place his arguments in a juster perspective. In any case, it is certainly not accidental that when Vincent Berger enters Mollberg's room (in a

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scene preceding the debate), he finds it filled with grotesque little figurines—imaginary gargoyles with animal traits incongruously scrambled together, all looking curiously like their creator and all with an "air of gripping sadness, like Goya's monsters which seem to remember they were once human." Mollberg has been molding these figurines for many years; and Malraux obviously wishes us to feel him as a sensibility haunted by the infinite malleability of nature and by the extent to which man is merely another element in the eternal flux. Moreover, when he is asked, at the end of the debate, what "concept" drove him to the conclusions he presents, he snaps back angrily: "Not a concept! Africa!" Upon which follows an hallucinatory parade of images: "The succession without end of days under the dusty firmament of Lybia or the heavy, grey sky of the Congo, the tracks of invisible animals converging toward the water-holes, the migration of famished dogs under the empty sky, the hour when all thought becomes weariness, the gloomy thrust of giant trees in pre-historic boredom. . . ."

This should be enough to show that Mollberg's views are no more "rational" than Vincent Berger's intuition of "the sacred"; and what resounds in the background of Mollberg's impressive speech is the thwarted bitterness of his defeat by "Africa," that is, by a nature so savage and so terrible that it has confirmed his latent fear of nature's ultimate triumph over man.[5] Projected on the plane of ideas, and buttressed with an impressive amount of ethnological evidence, this fear amounts to the Spenglerian thesis that every culture-cycle is an airtight and self-enclosed whole imprisoned in its own assumptions. There is no possibility of communication between cultures, hence no escape from the determinism of fate (in the form of the isolated mental structure of each culture), and no essence of man based on the continuity of his struggle against destiny. Directly addressing himself to Vincent Berger, Mollberg affirms: "Men are, perhaps, more thoroughly defined and classified by their form of fatalism than by anything else." The mental structure of our own civilization is dominated by the idea of history, and even more fundamentally by the dis-

[5] See also the following comment of the narrator while Mollberg is speaking: "Discussion and logic, the books in serried ranks on the shelves, were fighting for their rights against the voice of the dark continents." Mollberg is the voice of "the dark continents," not of "rationalism"; the very conception of reason is meaningless unless we believe in man as somehow superior to nature.

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covery of "time." Time is the fatality of modern man, and, while earlier cultures had believed in some sort of eternal value impervious to time, we make no exception to the inexorable iron grip of fatality on all of human life.

Now it is simply not true, as has been asserted over and over again, that Mollberg crushes all his interlocutors into a speechless mutism by the power of his arguments; the fact is that he is forced to concede a very important point to Thirard. For Mollberg's whole position hinges on the identification of man with what he "thinks," i.e., with being what has been called an "intellectual" in the opening pages. Malraux thus expects the attentive reader to know that Mollberg's argument is humanly fallacious from the very start; and he brings out this point in Thirard's question. Even if an Egyptian high priest and a Catholic cardinal exist in different psychic realms, Thirard asks, would not an Egyptian laborer and an Alsatian one have something in common? Mollberg cannot deny the pertinence of this thrust; and here is where the issue is joined. Mollberg is speaking:

> "The less men partake of their civilization, the more they resemble each other. I agree! But the less they partake of it, the more they fade away. The permanence of man can be conceived, but it's a permanence in nothingness."
>
> "Or in the fundamental?"
>
> It was my father [Vincent Berger] who put the question. *The point at issue was no longer the history of man, but the nature of each one present; everyone felt himself at stake.* (Italics added).

The debate has now become a reflection, in the last analysis, of the nature of the individual participants; what is at stake is *their* quality as men. And Mollberg's position is a perfect illustration of the arrogance of the intellectual who has not learned, like Vincent Berger, that man begins with "the other," and who, equating "humanity" only with his own sub-species, contemptuously relegates everyone else to the realm of "nothingness," i.e., animality. The reverse side of this arrogance is the susceptibility to despair, the self-hatred and *Schadenfreude* (the German word is appropriate) that impels Mollberg to say "with sardonic self-satisfaction" that "there's no better way of concentrating on man than looking at an ant-hill." Erich Heller has pertinently written that "Spengler's history is untrue because the mind which has

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conceived it is, despite its learning and seeming subtlety, a crude and wicked mind. The image of man which lurks behind Spengler's vast historical canvas is perverted. . . . For Spengler has no idea of the true stature of the problem of human freedom. Therefore his historical vision is lacking in depth as well as in love, pity and pathos."[6] Malraux is saying nothing else in his portrait of Mollberg, though with a nuance of sympathy for his character that Heller finds it impossible to muster for Spengler himself.

During the discussion with Mollberg, the latter exemplifies the nothingness of the non-intellectual man by pointing to some statues on the wall carved from the walnut trees surrounding the abbey at Altenburg. These, he asserts, are either statues—the product of a specific cultural tradition—or they are nothing, mere logs of wood; there is no "fundamental walnut" intermediate between the two, just as there is no "fundamental man" intermediate between intellectual or ideological man and the brute. Trees also take on symbolic value in another context, for Mollberg explains earlier to Vincent Berger that the pages of his proposed (and now abandoned) book demonstrating civilization as a conquest by man "are hanging from the lower branches of various types of trees from the Sahara to Zanzibar. Right. In accordance with tradition, the victorious carry off the spoils of the defeated." With these words, as well as Mollberg's reference to the statues, still in his mind, Vincent Berger strolls across the fields of Altenburg after the debate and looks at the rows of carefully cultivated walnut trees receding in the distance and framing the cathedral of Strasbourg in their perspective.

"Between the statues and the logs there were the trees" he thinks, "and their design which was as mysterious as life itself." The walnut trees of course figure forth the reality of "fundamental man" (neither intellectually self-conscious nor mere blank nothingness); and the human effort embodied in their cultivation is no doubt intended to contrast with the wilderness that broke Mollberg's spirit. Nonetheless, although the meaning of Malraux's symbolism is clear enough, one cannot help feeling a certain disharmony in the prominence given the tree-metaphor by Malraux's title. It is true that the sight of the trees evokes an impression of

[6] See Erich Heller, "Oswald Spengler and the Predicament of The Historical Imagination," *The Disinherited Mind* (Meridian Books, 1959), p. 193.

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"will and metamorphosis without end" in Vincent Berger's consciousness; but trees are still only a part of nature, and the use of this symbol clashes with Malraux's central thematic focus on *man's* freedom and creativity.[7]

IV

Vincent Berger's defense of man's eternal capacity to "humanize" the world, to transcend the circumstances in which the fatality of history may imprison him, is the spiritual climax of the middle section of the novel. And the remainder of the action of this section, which ends with Berger's death by poison gas, is a magnificent projection of this capacity in one of the most moving scenes of the contemporary novel.

After the outbreak of the first World War, Vincent Berger is assigned to German Intelligence on the Eastern Front; and he is detailed to look after a scientist who has invented a new poison gas which is ready to be tested in combat. Malraux again punctures the pretentions of the species "intellectual" by sketching the innocently obtuse inhumanity of the scientist with merciless *brio*. By contrast, the naive and childish chatter of the ordinary German soldiers, waiting in the trenches before the attack, is dense with the warmth of an all-pervasive humanity. The most absurd legends, myths and suggestions flash out like Roman candles as the voices sound in the enveloping darkness; but all of them bear the unmistakable stamp of man. One soldier ferociously advocates that all the enemy be castrated, but then adds this reflection: "It's not humanitarian, perhaps, but that way we'd finish them once and for all, and without killing anyone." Stories of adultery and lust end in the laconic comments: "But he let it go on, because of the kid"; or: "So the chap, instead of appearing in court, he went home, and then he hung himself."

Exactly as his son was to do twenty-five years later, Vincent Berger senses that he is at last coming close to "the fundamental"

[7] To make matters worse, Malraux unfortunately stresses the insignificance of man's endeavors at this point compared to the spectacle of the trees: "And that spire [i.e., of the cathedral] rising like the prayers of the maimed, and all the human patience and the human labor that were the waves of vineyards descending to the river, were only an evening background to the immemorial upsurge of the living wood, for the two thick clumps that wrested the strength from the earth itself to spread in their branches." One has the uneasy feeling that at this point Malraux's imagery swept him away and caused him to lose control of his theme.

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in man. "Listening in this live darkness, my father was conscious for the first time of the people of Germany. Or perhaps just of people: men." And what men really are, or what they can become in certain privileged moments, is gloriously shown in the "human apocalypse" unleashed by the gas attack. For when the Germans reach the Russian trenches, pushing their way through fields turned by the gas into an eerie universal putrefaction, the sight of the Russians in the terrible convulsions of strangulation releases an instinctive combination of anguish and fraternity that cannot be denied. Instead of advancing, the German soldiers return to their own lines and hospital units, bearing the bodies of men who have become their brothers out of an impulse far deeper than pity. For it seemed to arise from a need for *self*-protection against the spirit of evil: each Russian soldier was a talisman. Vincent Berger, abandoning his duty like the rest, meets his end in this fulfillment of his faith.

The power and majesty of this scene are so great that all writers on Malraux (including myself, in an earlier article)[8] have unanimously taken it as the key figuration of the novel's major theme: the fraternity of the human. My opinion now, however, is that such a reading unduly narrows the scope of Malraux's range, and that "fraternity" is only one manifestation of his theme rather than its entire substance. This substance is embodied essentially in Vincent Berger's intuition of "the sacred," the "humanization of the world" that arises out of man's liberty to oppose destiny; and this "humanization" can disclose itself not only in the upsurge of fraternity but also in art—or in the contemplation of the humblest work of human hands and the lowliest of human creatures. This is why Malraux, in the final section of the book, returns to the narrator—Vincent Berger's son—to bring us back to the present and give us a final epiphany of his true theme in its full extent.

This last scene centers on a French tank attack in which the narrator takes part, presumably in the series of battles leading to the French defeat. After being bogged down in a tank trap all night, and expecting the pinpointed artillery to zero in on them at any moment, the narrator's crew finally manage to disengage themselves and they stop in an evacuated village at dawn. Still harrowed by his night of terror, the narrator feels the simplest signs of life to

[8] See *The New Republic*, August 30, 1954.

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be a miracle, an apparition: "The world might have been as simple as the sky or the sea. And at the sight of the shapes in front of me, which are only the shapes of an abandoned, condemned village —I feel in the presence of an unaccountable gift—an apparition. All this might never have been, might never have been as it is! . . . There are other worlds, the world of crystals, of oceanic depths. . . ." The wonder of the human world being as it is overwhelms Vincent Berger's son, as it had overwhelmed his father on the night of his landing at Marseilles.

But the greatest miracle of all is man himself, in the guise of an old peasant couple too enfeebled to have gone on with the rest. The narrator looks at the wife:

> Harmonized with the cosmos like a stone. . . . Yet she smiles, a slow, pensive smile; beyond the football-field with its solitary goalposts, beyond the tank turrets gleaming in the dew like the bushes camouflaging them, she seems to be viewing death at a distance and even—oh, mysterious blink, sharp shadow at the corner of the eyelids!—even with irony. . . . Let the mystery of man re-appear from that enigmatic smile, and the resurrection of the earth becomes nothing more than a trembling backdrop.

That the earth should not be as simple as the sky and the sea, but everywhere bear the imprint of man; that an old peasant woman should be capable of looking with a smile in the face of death—this is the miracle of the human that Vincent Berger had felt in his intuition of "the sacred," and which now shines forth again, as from a Biblical illustration of Rembrandt's, in the debris of a war-torn village. "I can scarcely remember what fear is like" writes the narrator finally; "what I carry within me is the discovery of a simple, sacred secret."

No writer in modern literature can compete with Malraux—at least with the Malraux of this final scene—in evoking so poignantly what Wordsworth called "the still, sad music of humanity." And this music, despite its stillness and sadness, never ceases to sound in Malraux's novel above the roar of battle and the tumultous march of the centuries. Malraux manages to wrest an affirmation of an absolute value in man out of the very teeth of the experience which—for example, in Sartre's *La Nausée*—had led to Antoine Roquentin's frightening vision of man's absorption into the world of brute materiality. The disclosure of the contingency of existence

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had led Sartre to portray man himself as a futile excrescence on the blank surface of things; and despite the role that liberty plays in Sartre's philosophy, he has not yet succeeded (it is dubious whether he ever will succeed) in transcending the hopelessness of *La Nausée* by an equally powerful artistic expression. Indeed, one wonders whether Malraux's *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg,* consciously or otherwise, might not have been intended to meet the challenge of the vision of man proposed on *La Nausée* (which after all appeared in 1938, and which Malraux very probably would have read).

However that may be, there is no doubt that Malraux has managed, by the sheer force of his artistic genius, to extend the bounds of Existentialism in an extremely significant fashion. Even when Existentialism is determinedly atheist, as in Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre, the movement as a whole has drawn its image of man from the tortured cogitations of Kierkegaard; and that means from a Christianity which emphasizes the fallen nature of man and all the dark and gloomy aspects of human existence. Malraux, on the other hand, might be said to have created—paradoxical as it may sound—an Existentialism of the Enlightenment. For in reading *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg,* one thinks of Kant rather than of Kierkegaard—not to be sure the Kant of *The Critique of Pure Reason,* but the Kant who, in *The Critique of Judgment,* defined the "dynamic-sublime" as man's consciousness of the final inability of the power of nature, however menacing it might be, to force him to surrender his humanity. Malraux's image of man is therefore "sublime" in the strict meaning given that term by the greatest mind of the Enlightenment. Perhaps in no period of modern culture has such an image of man been more necessary or seemed less possible; and that Malraux can still make us believe in its viability is surely a remarkable tribute to his quality both as an artist and as a man.

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ROGER SALE

Having It Both Ways in *All the King's Men*

> A funeral parlor at midnight is ear-splitting compared to the effect you get in the middle of the morning in the back room of a place like Slade's if you are the first man there. You sit there and think how cozy it was last night, with the effluvium of brotherly bodies and the haw-haw of camaraderie, and you look at the floor where now there are little parallel trails of damp sawdust the old broom left this morning when the unenthusiastic Negro man cleaned up, and the general impression is that you are alone with the Alone and it is His Move.
>
> (*All the King's Men,* Harcourt, Brace edition, p. 16)

THIS IS THE CHARACTERISTIC VOICE of Jack Burden, and in order to place it generically, here is another voice speaking about quietness:

> In jail a man has no personality. He is a minor disposal problem, and a few entries on reports. Nobody cares who loves or hates him, what he looks like, what he did with his life. Nobody reacts to him unless he gives trouble. Nobody abuses him. All that is asked of him is that he go quietly to the right cell and remain quiet when he gets there. There is nothing to fight against, nothing to be mad at. The jailers are quiet men without animosity or sadism. All this stuff you read about men yelling and screaming, beating against the bars, running spoons along them, guards rushing in with clubs—all that is for the big house. A good jail is one of the quietest places in the world. You could walk through the average cell block at night and look in through the bars and see a huddle of brown blanket, or a head of hair, or a pair of eyes looking at nothing. You might hear a snore. Once in a long while you might hear a nightmare. The life in a jail is in suspension, without purpose or meaning.
>
> (Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*)

These voices speak from the inside; they are usually thought of as belonging to tough guys or smart alecks. It is difficult to speak in such tones and not abuse the reader, who is on the outside and who needs to be told the way things work. The reader of the

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average "private eye novel" has to put himself to sleep in order to be able to listen to the fancy talk characteristic of the tough guy. The narrator speaking from the inside who seeks not to be contemptuous of the reader's intelligence must really know something that those on the outside would not know and he must be willing to pay whatever consequences are due because he insists on this superiority. In the passages above, it is Jack Burden who fails and Philip Marlowe, private detective, who succeeds. Marlowe proceeds straightforwardly, with a careful eye for the relevance of detail and with a refusal to get cute. He speaks with great sympathy for the jailers and the jailed, thus placing himself amongst them, of their world. Jack's tone is less controlled, his details do not lead to his conclusion, his toughness is worn on his sleeve as though he needed to prove it was there. He also feels he must detach himself from the normal inhabitants of pool halls by using big words and by being metaphysical. He enjoys being on the inside but he needs to assure the reader that he is not part of that world. Marlowe, here at least, is willing to pay the penalty for talking down to the reader; he does not try to protect himself by anticipating the reader's irony. Jack constantly hedges his bet, talks down but then dissociates himself from the consequences.

Discovering what attitude to take towards the voice of Jack Burden is the main task for the reader of *All the King's Men*. Jack speaks from the inside because he must tell us what it is like to be one of the king's men, what is involved in knowing all about state and local politics. But Jack is not simply on the inside the way Sadie Burke and Sugar-Boy are; he is special, a blue blood without portfolio. Jack is also very knowing about Burden's Landing, situated on the Gulf, far from the rednecks up north, home of former Governor Stanton and Judge Irwin. The story of *All the King's Men* is the story of the entanglement of the main figures of Burden's Landing—Jack, his mother, Judge Irwin, Adam and Anne Stanton—in the world of the capital and the provinces, and Jack is on the inside because he is the only one who is sure he understands both worlds. Burden's Landing is a world that existed once long ago, so it can be seen clearly only in memory; his description of that world is therefore static, always filled with the same details. The world dominated by Willie Stark is constantly changing, and, instead of natural description, Jack

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provides meticulously detailed stories of the machinery of politics and completely dramatized accounts of Willie creating his public image, whether that public be two people or twenty thousand. Perhaps the finest instance of Jack demonstrating his right to speak from the inside is the account of the Case of the Upright Judge, Jack uncovering the dirt on Judge Irwin that will stick to his coat. Here he employs his knowledge of both worlds and his professional training, about which he usually is embarrassingly self-congratulatory. Not once in fourteen pages does he allow himself to abuse his position on the inside by lapsing into a sneer or a set piece. He bullies Miss Littlepaugh the way he does almost everyone else, but he does so only after he is sure that there is no other way to gain information from her. Finally, the story itself is fascinating, rivalled among Warren's many inset stories only by Hamish Bond's narrative of the African coast in *Band of Angels.*

But, as we have seen in the passage about Slade's place, Jack is not content to be knowing only about the jungles of cities and the rarefied air of Burden's Landing. He constantly aspires to demonstrate his right to talk from the inside about life. Here he is on Anne Stanton's laugh:

> Her eyes were glittering like the eyes of a child when you give a nice surprise, and she laughed in a sudden throaty tingling way. It is the way a woman laughs for happiness. They never laugh that way just when they are being polite or at a joke. A woman only laughs that way when something has touched her way down in the very quick of her being and the happiness just wells out as natural as breath and the first jonquils and mountain brooks. When a woman laughs that way it always does something to you. It does not matter what kind of face she has got either. You hear that laugh and feel you have grasped a clean and beautiful truth. You feel that way because that laugh is a revelation. It is a great impersonal sincerity. It is a spray of dewy blossom from the great central stalk of All Being, and the woman's name and address hasn't got a damn thing to do with it. Therefore, that laugh cannot be faked. If a woman could learn to fake it she would make Nell Gwyn and Pompadour look like a couple of Campfire Girls wearing bifocals and ground-gripper shoes and with bands on their teeth. She could set all society by the ears. For all any man wants is to hear a woman laugh like that. (p. 219)

The voice is still tough, but with a difference. Jack has a love of the natural world and cleanliness and truth. His images of the sound of Anne's laughter—he uses them again in describing her

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on the other side of the tennis court when they were younger—are characteristic of all the fake nature writing in the novel; here they serve only to contribute to the general unreality of Anne Stanton. At the time of this scene, Jack has seen Anne only occasionally in ten years, and no reason is offered why she should laugh this way and even less why she should suddenly stop. But then Anne never is more than a soap opera figure with her natural wisdom about being in love and getting married at age seventeen and her clutching at her last chance by becoming Willie's mistress when she is almost thirty-five.

But above and beyond the gratuitousness of the passage, the leaden repetition of "a woman laughs that way," and the embarrassing collocation of the tough guy with the lover of truth and mountain brooks, is the hollowness of the assumption that Jack knows about everything. He is only vulgar in his familiar tone toward historical figures; he can make Nell Gwyn and Pompadour "relevant" just as he always knows what the great men of the past really meant: "Listen, pal, there was a man named Dante . . ." (p. 251); "A man may forget the death of the father, but never the loss of the patrimony, the cold-faced Florentine, who is the founding father of our modern world, said, and he said a mouthful" (p. 417). Even worse, he knows about the nature of a woman's laughter, and his patronizing use of the second person pronoun assures us that we do not. This smugness is very upsetting as it assumes that the reader, even if he has never heard this laugh or could not recognize it if he did, some day will; thus "you hear," "you have grasped," and "you feel" take on the force of "you will hear," "you will grasp," and "you will feel." Warren apparently is not content to have the narrator speak from the side of his mouth just about politics and the socially elite, and he apparently is not aware that the voice that speaks from the inside about Life always begins to sound slightly hysterical.

One of the reasons it is difficult to control the voice that speaks from the inside is that it is hard to know how to prevent the voice from sounding pompous about matters of common knowledge, and from trying to reach levels of sagacity and awareness available to no one. Jack falls neatly into both mistakes in a passage early in the novel. Willie, Jack, and Sugar-Boy leave Mason City to go to Burden's Landing to try to scare Judge Irwin. The section

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opens with this observation: "Burden's Landing is one hundred and thirty miles from Mason City, off to the southwest. If you multiply one hundred and thirty by two it makes two hundred and sixty miles." Jack then leans back in the seat and closes his eyes, but, just as he could sense Anne Stanton's laugh metaphysically, so too he can see the side of the road while riding with his eyes closed:

> Close to the road a cow would stand knee-deep in the mist, with horns damp enough to have a pearly shine in the starlight, and would look at the black blur we were as we went whirling into the blazing corridor of light which we could never quite get into for it would always be splitting the dark just in front of us. The cow would stand there knee-deep in the mist and look at the black blur and the blaze and then, not turning its head, at the place where the black blur and blaze had been, with the remote, massive, unvindictive indifference of God-All-Mighty or Fate or me, if I were standing there knee-deep in the mist, and the blur and the blaze whizzed past and withered on off between the fields and the patches of woods. (p. 40)

The car then moves on, Jack muses some more on the countryside, and two paragraphs later Sugar-Boy is driving down the new boulevard by the bay in Burden's Landing. A number of things about this passage about the cow are worth noting: There is the solemn tone in which Jack says that a car will never catch up to its own headlights. There is the needless repetition of "the blur and the blaze" and "standing there knee-deep." There is Jack's telepathic sensing of the cow's mood, with or without his eyes closed. But most important, there is the complete gratuitousness of the symbol. The fact that nature is indifferent to man has nothing to do with the rest of the passage, the chapter, or anything in the novel except the most abstract statement of the theme, and, even if knowing this were a necessary part of the action, the use of the cow to communicate this truth involves an extremely awkward dragging in of an otherwise extraneous object on which meaning can be heaped.

The reasons why Warren is not content with his tough guy narrator and so involves him in these extremely damaging and usually pointless intrusions and discourses are not far to seek. Warren is apparently determined to be a philosophical novelist, one who, to use his own description of Conrad, "is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images always

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fall into dialectical configuration, for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience." Warren seems to want to have it both ways. He wants his narrator completely embroiled in and knowing about the areas of his special competence, and yet he also wants him to detach himself and strive to "the level of generalization about values." In this novel, the result of wanting to have it both ways is that finally he has it neither way; caught in this fashion, Jack often sounds absurd or hysterical.

This impulse to have it both ways is not, of course, necessarily self-contradictory; the narrator of many successful novels does speak from the inside and then rises to the level of generalization about values. But the voice changes in these novels as the irony is established, broken, and re-established from a new point of view—this is Conrad's technique in *Nostromo*—and Warren does not seem to want to commit himself to such a method. Part of the difficulty lies in the use of the first person narrator who is both character and narrator, both learning and learned, so that shifts in voice usually involve real awkwardness. But even more important, Warren seems only partially willing to be ironic about his central character, to insist on the limitations of speaking from the inside.

At the level of generalization about values, this irony is fully articulated in *All The King's Men*. Jack's development towards self-knowledge is rendered by the shifts in Jack's philosophy which result from his gradual involvement in the worlds around him. As narrator, Jack is able to achieve ironic distance from the metaphysical positions he took in the past and now sees to be wrong. For instance, when Jack adopts the idea of the Great Twitch—"nothing was your fault or anybody's fault, for things are always as they are"—on his return from California, the later Jack Burden, speaking as narrator, allows us to see what is wrong. He has already, in the Cass Mastern episode, given us the Spider Web theory and the subsequent narrative demonstrates how Jack ran to the theory of the Great Twitch because he could not face the truth he found in working on the Mastern papers. Thus the narrator dissociates himself from his own past and prepares the way for an acceptance of the Spider Web theory—"the world

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is all of one piece"—and its concomitant—"if you would accept the past you might hope for the future."

But Warren is not really willing to commit himself to all the implications of this development. Jack's tone is kept constant throughout, and the tough guy is allowed to sound impressive even though he later will be repudiated. For instance, here is Jack when Willie tries to tell him about the new hospital:

> "I'll be dead," he said, "and you'll be dead, and I don't care whether he votes for me or not, he can go there and—"
>
> "And bless your name," I said.
>
> "Damn it!" he shook me hard, crumpling my lapel in his big hand, "you stand there grinning like that—get that grin off your face—get it off or I'll—"
>
> "Listen," I said, "I'm not any of your scum, and I'm still grinning when I please."
>
> "Jack—hell, Jack—you know I don't mean that—it's just you stand there and grin. Damn it, can't you understand? Can't you?" (p. 247)

This is the little man talking back to the big man because the little man is Jack Burden of Burden's Landing. In the end, of course, Jack will come to see himself as one of Willie's scum, but he is not, despite this confession, quite willing to relinquish such an attractive position as the one he is in here. Thus we are made to sympathize with Jack even though he must turn his back on the position he takes in this scene. But this discrepancy between tone and moral position is even clearer towards the end of the novel. After the murder of Adam and Willie, Jack has learned almost all he ever will. When a photographer comes to Adam's funeral, Jack tells him: "If you live long enough, you'll find out there are some kinds of son-of-a-bitch you don't have to be even to be a newspaperman." After he finds out who Jack is, the photographer retorts: "you work for Stark and you call somebody a son-of-a-bitch" (p. 427). Jack sees that the photographer is partly right, and, seeing this, he can only stare at him. This scene very consciously parallels an earlier one in which Jack gets tough with a policeman who molests him when he is walking with Anne. Here, in the later scene, we are supposed to see how much Jack has learned, how much more sense and humility he has. But this new humility does not keep Jack from calling the photographer a "squirt face." Up to the very end, Jack acts as he always has; he

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refers to Trollope as "Anthony," he feels free to pontificate about the fate of Sugar-Boy, and he abuses Anne in their last conversation much as he did in their first.

Warren, then, does not really want ever to have to repudiate his narrator, some of whose absurdity, vulgarity, and weakness I have discussed already. Jack "learns" something, but only in an abstract way. He says he sees the world differently, but his tone never leads the reader to believe that the violence which destroyed his world really touches him. He only partly takes on the responsibilities for what he is and wants to be, a tough guy with a difference. He refrains from telling Sugar-Boy that Tiny was the one who called Adam, but he never stops talking as though he knew what had to be known about everything really important.

We have three reasons, then, why Jack fails as a narrator. First, Warren is simply uncertain about what role he wants Jack to take. This, I suspect, is the source of the endless chatter about jonquils and mimosas and mountain streams, and for the more excessive of the pasted-on symbols. Second, Warren seems to feel that to take a stance on the inside is compellingly attractive even when it involves Jack in being solemn about the obvious or pretentiously knowing about real mysteries. Finally, Warren does not really believe in his story enough, he does not see that this story of growth commits him to changes in the narrator's way of talking about the world. If Jack is just as much of a smart aleck in 1939 as he was in 1922, the whole dramatic point of the novel is evaded and finally blurred.

Although it is admittedly dangerous to speculate, I think we can say that the major source of all these weaknesses is the fact that Warren's genius lies in one direction and his bent and ambitions lie in another. Warren can be a marvelous storyteller; the main story of *All the King's Men* is not just "good plotting"; it is the testament of an imagination that always seems to have the best detail right at hand. But the nagging concern with symbol and theme, the effort to rise to the level of generalization about values, mars and finally negates much that is good in the book. To delete the network of symbols and the discourses on metaphysics would be to make the book much better and not necessarily lesser. Most of the symbols are like the one about the cow; they seem to open up the novel for richer and more elaborate exegesis, but in fact

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they never point to anything the brute action of the story has not already made clear. It is difficult to think of one symbol in the novel, unless it is Judge Irwin's advice to Jack about duck hunting, that it is not at least a little embarrassing because of the wrench its gratuitousness forces on the narrative voice. Even the better ones, like Jack's mother's birth cry, suffer because Warren seems afraid we will miss the point and so resorts to explanation and repetition.

When we move to the later novels and *Brother to Dragons,* all the indications of a split between Warren's ability and his ambition grow more and more marked as the wonderful storyteller is gradually buried by the images which strive to rise to symbols and the symbols which strive to rise to allegory at the level of generalization about values. Seeing that Jefferson had to be the hero of the story of his cousin's fratricide was a stroke of genius; adding the choral "R.P.W." spoiled much of this brilliant perception. The same thing is true to a lesser extent of the heavy voice of the modern narrator of *World Enough and Time.* Finally, in *The Cave,* Warren tries to return to the methods of *Night Rider* and *All the King's Men,* to ground his novel in the life of the characters, but now the story is almost completely dictated by Warren's sense of the "meaning of experience," and his tremendous technical skill is made the victim of the abstraction represented most clearly in the title. And, as always in Warren, when the urgency of the tale is not felt, the writing grows loose; the narrator easily falls into gratuitous comments on the sex-demon and the gullibility of the American Public, and perhaps worse, a good deal of the dialogue seems to exist in order to convince us that the author really knows how Tennessee hillbillies talk. The genius remains for recreating the urgency of experience, but the bent, which has grown more and more powerful over the years, is for metaphysics, and so Warren tries to have it both ways. The impulse is finally self-destructive, and *All the King's Men,* even though it is his best novel, remains, for that reason, a dishonest book.

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KATHERINE HOSKINS

Conversation Pieces II

1) Speaking with CS of the inordinate sensibility, sensitivity of so many woman artists. As she said, they are like certain bugs whose antennae are forever quivering.

These same sensitives, however, endure events and many of them—illnesses, break-downs, love affairs, divorces, etc.—any one of which would finish me off. They are probably the toughest people in the world.

2) Our critics seem often to be playing a kind of Grandmother's Trunk. One random chosen and rather short paragraph in H. Levin's *Power of Blackness* makes mention of Ethan Brand, Faust, Orestes, Ibsen, Prometheus, the Greeks, the Christians, Los Alamos and Melville.

3) Is ours the first time in which "to shorten" equalizes with "to make better"?

4) Gentilnes
Gentleness

It seems to me that there is a great tactile difference between old spelling (take "Anthony and Cleopatra" as Auden prints it) and new. *Il* so much lighter than *le*—one *s* quicker and more delicate than two. It also suggests original meanings—*gentil,* or one/lie. Archaisms and modernisms are raisins in the rice pudding of "natural words in their natural order."

5) Most criticism of the What Else Did He Mean school is a little beside the point so far as the writer goes. Only Kafka seems to have understood his daemon. He bridled and saddled as well as rode it. So he is one of the few for whom geological double-reading really avails—see Donald Gray's book on *The Castle.* K. is wholly responsible. Melville, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare were mediums. Perhaps that is why they have a grandeur that responsibility must refuse.

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6) For A. It is pure snobbery not to be as charitable towards ourselves as we are towards others.

7) Rather than because they are particularly wise in themselves, I think we latch onto certain wise phrases or moral statements because they are prophetic; of prophecy based, albeit unconsciously, on known facts or observations. Thus, "Ils n'ont pas fait carrière" (remarked of my youthful heroes, Proust, Gide, Valéry) has recurred to my mind hundreds of times without apparent cause. It is also true that I am myself incapable of making a career. . . . When I said that if I did nothing else, I would make C. at home in the outside world, I was simply describing one of her most prominent characteristics.

Beware of enthusiasms, of moralities! They won't remain in theory but act themselves out in our lives, act themselves out through us. Like "The Life of Forms in Art."

8) The world of literature has certain landscapes, cities, *quartiers* where one writer or another is commonly to be found. With this in mind, one could make a charming relief map, a literary Carte du Tendre.

9) Gauguin's Tahitians
Are Japanese plus Parisian.
Johnson was ill at ease
In the Hebrides.
Bishop's and Auden's "Blues"
Stick like gum shoes.

Though simple men may learn sophistication,
You can't reverse the situation.

10) A.—on the fall of words:

The Yankee says:	*How* are you?
The Philadelphian:	How *are* you?
South of the M.D. Line:	How are *you?* (yü)

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Again, it's
Yankee: Good-*morning*
Maryland: *Good*-mawning

The latter gay and hopeful with his adjective, while the former limits his praise to the one period of the one day.

11) The trouble with palmistry, graphology, astrology, probably of phrenology, is that they can all detect a tendency or talent, but have no quantitative or qualitative measurements. A handwriting may show "artistic" leanings—but whether for Christmas cards or museum works remains as cloudy as ever.

12) Autobiography—

Potomac birthed me.
James and Connecticut nursed me.
Then Arno, Seine,
Grande del Norte, Thames.
For husband and child I fished
Schuykill and Ipswich.
And now abide
Charles-side.

13) James—*The Tragic Muse:* "A poor man doesn't believe anything in the same way that a rich man does." Cf. the famous colloquy between Hemingway and Fitzgerald. . . . Not that each of us doesn't find it out for himself.

14) The sensation of happiness that the first spring days bring. We say this is old stuff, it has had its share of comment—but not *this* spring, this here one. Suddenly one is free—thoughts spring up—ways of thinking one had supposed gone forever. A sensation of ability.

The grosbeaks and finches stopped by two days ago. I couldn't see color or shape, but knew them by the way they clung to the catalpa beans. And there is a new sparrow in the hedge. His call will continue through the summer. So, hearing it, it now seems hot and summer-time. A successor to the winter fly.

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Again—spring—March—a snow-storm and through the snow the call of geese going North.

15) How joyful it must be to "think a problem through." All I ever manage is to come up with a decision.

16) *The Living Novel—A Symposium.* Of all these writers, only Ralph Ellison said anything memorable, or memorably expressed. A curious illiteracy in the others, though "dedication" and "craftsmanship" are their by-words.

Following, got out Jessamyn West's *The Witch-Diggers.* Not impossible to read, but surprisingly close to it. No fault to find, no praise to give.

17) Robert Graves—*The Crowning Privilege*

G. betrays himself by a desire to *épater* the Aristos—i.e. his fellow poets and critics. This leads to an exaggeration of expression which in its normal state would be perfectly acceptable. Thus he calls certain rhymes—charm, calm: bore, mother-in-law—indecent. One notes that they are really only vulgar, but follows along until he says that three-syllable rhymes are also indecent. And that is simply wrong. Three-syllable rhymes are for comedy, they are funny. As see their brilliant effect in *Don Juan.*

He says you rhyme by consonants: I think you do it by vowels. But we seem to come out at the same place.

He also comes a cropper in his "close textual reading"—as in Yeats's "Chosen" where Y. was clearly writing as a woman. Eliot did very much the same thing years ago with the "Sky-Lark." And what did G. prove by tearing "The Reaper" to pieces except to gratify his father-inspired dislike of Wordsworth?

Re Yeats's "new style"—G. says it was Pound who started him on it. Ralph Hone says it was Synge. If I had any dates to offer, I would suggest marriage.

Rather than his style, G. would have done much better to investigate Yeats's truly remarkable knowledge of women.

Graves is, of course, very right very often—as in his estimate of Auden as a light-verse poet.

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18) Rain, rain, rain—It was on a morning like this that W. sent me that most fraternal and understanding of messages: "Tell Katherine not to start anything today."

19) Easier for a rich man to pass through the eye of a needle than for a bourgeois to enter the Temple of Angst.

20) Re Existenz—

God is dead.
Long live God.

But what an excellent book is William Barrett's on the subject. Modest in manner—magistral in result. His account of Heidegger's "field of being" made me think of an oyster. Psychically, I imagine we aren't much beyond the bivalves at that. But I wonder if we couldn't insinuate that little piece of hardness that attaches to the shell as soul, or centre?

21) A: Was Whitman a great poet?
B: I'm afraid he was.

22) Every now and then somebody has to write another piece on Boston. And they are usually very witty and accurate on the subject. They all omit the salient fact that Boston is not a capital but a provincial city. To ask Boston to be like New York is like asking Lyons to be like Paris, or Liverpool like London. For no more than a person can have two heads can a country have two capitals.

23) A., who has the immunity of power as well as frequent provocation, says that he tries never to condemn a person to his face. His reason—in anyone, self-respect is so precarious that no one has a right to endanger it.

24) Many times where the word "weakness" is used, "ignorance" would do just as well.

25) "Are you married? have you children?" I say to a woman poet.

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"O," says she, "no. I was afraid that if I married I would never write."

She hadn't realized that, having no valets now, we must do our living ourselves.

26) *Parktilden Village*—This constant honing of the metaphor ends by leaving the reader fixed on the author's brilliant knife play at the expense of possibly more important activities.

27) It is the most elementary precaution against fate to avoid saying things like, "At least I will never live like that, I will never fall into that particular trap." Say it—and six months later you will be in the trap, etc., and thankful that things are no worse.

28) I think that one reason I prefer new things—pictures, buildings, etc.—to old is that the new is still in the realm of the fantastic. It is still fluid and not yet settled down to being one fact. We haven't yet agreed on what, exactly, it means—have not frozen it into history.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

UNTIL RECENTLY one could have answered the question "Who is the best American playwright?" with the pseudo-Gidian rejoinder, "Tennessee Williams, alas." After *Period of Adjustment* this view may need readjusting. The main denigratory epithet for Williams' more recent works has been "unhealthy," but this somewhat philistine label is misleading; "cowardly" and "untruthful" seem to me apter words to describe *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer,* or *Sweet Bird of Youth.* But no full-length play of his before *Period of Adjustment* could have been called dull. Vulgar, biased, pretentious, jejune, oversimplified, unreal—all of these, if you will, but not boring. Which, regrettably, does not even mean that *Period* is free from that first sextet of sins, to which, however, it adds the seventh and deadliest, dullness. I am not saying that there were not some members of the audience who guffawed fitfully throughout the evening, but I cannot help feeling that they were the sort of people who would laugh to see their grandmother slip on a banana peel, and split their sides if she were unable to get up again.

Williams has lately been announcing with a complaisant snigger that *Period of Adjustment* represents a breaking away from his "black" plays toward a new-found serenity, gained with blood, sweat, and fifty-dollar checks for his analyst. I doubt that *Period* is serene, or that it is healthy; but I use the word not as most people, critics included, seem to use it. For it is an error of long standing to assume that the subject-matter or the verbiage of a play is what renders it healthy or unhealthy; to the extent that these terms have meaning, they refer to intentions and implications. *Period of Adjustment,* though superficially harmless, falsifies truth in two ways typical of Tennessee Williams. First, it asserts that the seemingly controlled, stable, functioning people are just as badly off, when the full truth is out, as the flagrantly disturbed ones; and, secondly, it implies that a little good-will and effort can set the gravest emotional conflicts aright. As concerns the latter, since I cannot feel that Williams is stupid and believes in the preposterous Hollywood happy ending, I can only surmise that when a frigid, hysterical girl at the end of this or that play of his reaches out to a sadistic and homosexual husband, and an orchestra all but intones "Home, Sweet Home," what the author is cravenly suggesting is, "Of course there is no hope for such as these, but I'll be damned if I'll come out and say it!" This is Williams' dishonesty: he could love the audience twice as well, loved he not the box office more. And as regards the implication that the difference between human functioning

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and malfunction is roughly zero, this simply isn't true. Doubtless it is not, as puritans would have it, a difference in kind, but only in degree; it does, however, exist. To minimize it or rationalize it away is the stratagem of a guilty conscience. The heroine of *Period,* a student nurse, describes the world (shades of the forest of Arden!) as a giant neurological ward, and herself the nurse in it. This is, of course, Williams seeing the world as a psychiatric ward, and himself as its male nurse. But no amount of wishing, even with all of Williams' brilliance and libido behind it, will make it so.

There is one sort of truth in *Period of Adjustment:* clinical truth. Whenever a character reveals the cracks of his psyche, this is done with the accuracy of a psychiatric case history. But there is surely another view of man which perceives him as something that cannot be contained in a manila folder, and this the play fails to provide. In short, there is something lopsided about a play where in each of three married couples the woman takes the aggressive role and initiates the principal events. There is something suspect about a play in which the only intense warmth is generated in the relationship of the two younger husbands. There is something the matter with a play in which the supposedly healthy, solid citizen can readily fall in with an infantile get-rich-quick scheme of a markedly neurotic wartime buddy about whom he feels curiously warm. And all this becomes even more sinister when we consider that the entire action takes place in a house built above an enormous cave, and it is announced repeatedly with a subtlety that I can only call cymbalism that the house is slowly but surely crumbling and sinking into the abyss. Whether this metaphor should be applied to the world or merely to Williams' art remains debatable.

Even in his style Williams is becoming baroque. The beautiful language of the earlier plays has been supplanted by heavyhanded gongorism. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* for instance, there was obsessive play with the word "mendacity." In *Period of Adjustment,* "obfuscation" in Act One, and "dignity" and its cognates in Act Two, receive similarly compulsive kicking around. But perhaps it is time to stress the one good thing about this production: the splendid performances of the four principals. Barbara Baxley, in particular, creates enough truth and beauty to inscribe the largest Grecian urn; it is too bad that it has to be wasted here on a vessel of quite a different sort.

Robert Brustein has archly suggested that *Period of Adjustment* was not written by Tennessee Williams, but by some hack usurping his name. This seems to me all the more likely as Mr. Williams must recently have been busying himself with a play called *Hedda Gabler,* which David Ross, the producer-director, unwarrantedly ascribes to Henrik Ibsen. In this production which was fulsomely praised by every newspaper critic in the business, Hedda is played by Anne Meacham, a talented actress who has magnificently portrayed one Tennessee Wil-

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liams heroine and understudied several others; unfortunately the part of the young girl in *Suddenly Last Summer* which seemed to fit Miss Meacham like a glove was no glove at all, but a shirt of Nessus. It has encased her, and her Hedda, in such a ranting agony of Tennesseean frustration that even as simple a statement as "I don't care," in which Hedda voices her gelid boredom with her husband, has to be turned into a taunt bordering on a tantrum, as if she wanted Tesman to rape and disembowel her on the spot. Miss Meacham wears enough green eye-shadow to make a Gorgon envious, has her hair up in a Bloody Mary hairdo, and stalks, stamps, and shrieks as though she were playing all of Dracula's brides simultaneously. Add to this a simpering Tesman who is clearly a mama's, or auntie's, boy, mincing his words and patently incapable of making love to a woman; a Judge Brack (Frederick Rolf) who sucks every syllable he utters as if it were an obscene lollypop and who at any moment might apply the corncob to Hedda; an Eilert Loevborg who looks uncomfortable without a torn T-shirt and whose manuscript must have read like something by Kerouac; a Thea Elvsted who flutters like one of Williams' odious "good girls"; an Aunt Julia straight off the nearest decaying plantation; and you have a pastiche of Williams that on Broadway would have made the angels weep, but off-Broadway is considered art and rakes in money. By the way, Elizabeth Colquhoun, an English actress who plays the part of the maid, with some dozen lines to speak, puts all the rest of the cast to shame.

The translation by Michael Meyer is of a kind all too frequent in England, a sort of tea-and-crumpets Ibsen in which "you are a year senior to me," "today she's been taken especially bad," "we visited to Rome" and "if *the* worst comes to *the* worst" things are "intriguing." Mr. Meyer came over from England to see this production, and went home in dismay. Even for such a translation as his, the punishment seems too severe.

While we are off-Broadway, three more productions should be noted. The least painful of these was Molly Kazan's double bill of short plays, *Rosemary* and *The Alligators*. Both pieces are slight and less than finished works: they seemed somehow Actors' Studio improvisations rather than plays, and Actors' Studio improvisations seem, in turn, less impromptu dramatic sketches than group therapy for actors. All the same, in *Rosemary* Mrs. Kazan latched on to a good idea: a young married couple of struggling vaudeville performers act out for publicity shots their little-boy-and-little-girl routine in kiddie clothes on a near-deserted beach. A middle-aged, middle-class couple who happen to be there are persuaded to snap a camera the vaudevillians have rented and lugged along. The young couple is having difficulties centering about the husband's unwillingness to accept paternal responsibilities toward his baby daughter. The bourgeois couple, who at first bantered pleasantly with the artistes, now egg them on to greater ef-

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forts; finally the vaudevillians, possessed by their act, become garishly real, squabbling, mean children. When the bourgeois pair is outraged and retreats in a dudgeon, the now united "kiddies" retort with jeers and cat-calls; but this moment of euphoric solidarity is followed closely by a depressed awareness of the flaws in their respective childhoods caused by the selfishness of their parents, and of the resultant damage to their adult lives. Thereupon the young husband (flavorsomely played by William Daniels) promises to live up to his new duties. Thus in the conclusion of *Rosemary* Mrs. Kazan successfully blends three elements: the battle of the sexes, or the Shavian view of man; the hostility between the artist and the bourgeoisie, or the romantic view; regression, reliving of childhood experiences, and self-realization, or the psychoanalytic view. If the rising action did not rise at an angle of a mere ten degrees, and if Piper Laurie, as the young wife, possessed the rudiments of acting, this would have been a provocative vignette, but, in any case, no more than that.

The Alligators offers us a rather more conventional plot, in which an ambitious young TV and film producer wants to make an "enlightened" movie biography of a dead gangster, showing that gangsterism is not so much sheer moral evil as a regrettable result of certain social and psychological factors. The old-fashioned ethical views of the gangster's frightened but shrewd widow merely elicit the producer's condescending smugness, but a jar of acid thrown by the dead gangster's mob into the producer's actress-girlfriend's face presumably awaken, belatedly, his understanding. As the gangster's widow, Jo Van Fleet gave a bravura performance which will be long remembered by the fortunate few who saw it, but Miss Laurie trying to simulate a totally ungifted actress managed to be ludicrous. Had she played the part absolutely straight, her natural badness would have been quite convincing. I am a little worried about the contradictions in the orientations of the two plays: the first Freudian, the second anti-Freudian, but I suppose such scruples had best be reserved for works of greater literary consequence.

The Rules of the Game is minor Pirandello which could have made an effective one-acter (a form in which Pirandello excelled), but drawn out to a full evening's length this tragicomic little marital triangle becomes a rather untidy trapezoid. In the hands of actors who dragged out what ought to be crisp and sophisticated as far as ponderous histrionics could stretch it, matters became unbearable. Indeed, the trio of principals and the three main supporting players seemed to me six characters in search of an assassin. Perhaps the most trying performance in a close contest was that of Joanna Merlin, the blaring monotony of whose presence was relieved only by the astounding changes in the size of her bosom from act to act, not, I daresay, ascribable to natural causes. But it was an evening in which one had to be grateful for even the slightest form of variety.

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Before discussing anything The Living Theatre puts on, it behooves one to say grace for the existence of a repertory company willing to serve up plays that are out of the ordinary. Let us now consider this said, and get down to the unhappy business of *In the Jungle of Cities* by Bertolt Brecht, just added to the repertory. From the moment the first text is flashed on the screen and we spot that catachrestic *w* in "Don't wrack your brains," an effect of alienation sets in undreamt of by Brecht. But though Gerhard Nellhaus' translation does not manage to cope with the curious blend of elevated, almost legalistic, formalism and plain-spoken toughness that is Brecht's style (or one of his styles), it is still the best thing about this production, and free of the howlers that crop up in a Bentley translation. This early play, written in 1924 when Brecht was 26, belongs to his symbolist-expressionist period, of which the uneven but impressive *Baal* is a much more distinguished example. *In the Jungle of Cities* concerns the fight between a poor young intellectual who works in a Chicago lending library and a rich Malayan lumber dealer who wants to buy and corrupt him by foul means or (if necessary) fair. The plot would be too complicated to summarize—even if it were not too obscure to grasp—but as far as I can make it out, it deals with a kind of Self and Anti-Self, two aspects of the individual: that which in the name of honesty, self-fulfillment, and freedom is willing to be both destructive and self-destructive, and that which in the name of the world and the devil is willing to indulge in mock generosity, sham self-sacrifice, and a relentlessly hounding pseudo-solicitude. This is truly Brechtian; for Brecht was a man whose most sinister views were couched in cleverness and charm, and whose decencies went always somehow against the grain of his asperity. But to elevate one's own slightly puerile perversities into an image of man, to pretend that an extremely idiosyncratic inscape is a great universal symbol (as we now see Tennessee Williams doing), is arrogant falsification. Brecht actually recreated the situation of *Jungle* in a later, maturer play, the excellent *Puntila* (which Nellhaus translated even better for Repertory Boston), and The Living Theatre would have been well advised to do this riper play.

Matters are not helped by a shoddy and threadbare production, lighting that slashes faces in half, music that enervates the ear, scenery that is cluttered and un-Brechtian in spirit, uncertain staging and acting, and, above all, as unattractive a set of players as I have ever seen assembled on any stage—what price naturalism? There is, to be sure, a superior performance by John A. Coe, and here and there a good moment from Marilyn Chris, Grant Code, and one or two others, but the turbid mass of the play comes alive only by fits and starts—not so much epic as epileptic theatre.

Returning now to Broadway, we find there two attractive theatrical events. It is a little saddening that they should be the only good things to report on at this time, and that they should both be imported: it is

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a painful thing when the truth sounds like snobbery. It is even more painful when one has to share it with *Time Magazine.*

A Taste of Honey would be a good play by anyone; by Shelagh Delaney, an English teen-ager, it is extraordinary. It is a small, charming, tender play: for the first half you think it will be hard-boiled and winsome by turns, or even both at once. But presently you become aware of an overwhelming loneliness, and of the gallant, pathetic striving of a couple of deeply dented but wholly lovable young people not to succumb to their aloneness in a big, ramshackle one-room apartment which, though rather smaller than the world, appears just as grubby and impersonal. Then you are utterly drawn into the play and to these two not quite innocent innocents. In the early part of *A Taste of Honey,* the humdrum life of a very young girl in the North of England who goes from pillar to post with her sluttish and boozy but ribaldly amusing mother elicits some interest by its authenticity of voice, but it does not command our undivided attention. The girl's wearily wise acceptance of her mother and even wearier gestures at rebellious self-assertion lead to her schoolgirl romance and affair with a Negro sailor (this part is written and played a trifle too prettily to ring true). There follows the mother's desertion: the old girl goes off with a rather classy young gigolo (presented, likewise, more jovially than might be, but saved by Nigel Davenport's stylish performance which perfectly balances the fellow between polish and putrescence). All this has interest and nicely shifting emotional appeal, but it still fails to be absorbing. When, however, the girl is left alone in an apartment she hates, has had to quit school, supports herself by working in a shoe-store and bar, is pregnant by the Negro sailor who'll probably never come back; when she takes in, to share her loneliness, a pleasant, artistic young boy, who, alas, is a homosexual, and they both would like to be lovers but can summon up no more than devotion and bickering, when her advanced pregnancy forces her to stay at home, with the young art student, himself impecunious, looking after her—then, at last, a warm, understated, exquisite sadness descends on the play. From then on to the end, *A Taste of Honey* shimmers with the funny, wistful, awe-inspiring spectacle—set down without any self-pity—of two children trying to face the grimness of an all too precipitous adulthood with the greatest degree of adolescent humor and grace.

The truly surprising skill that this play commands is the way of making language do double duty: for in a play about ordinary people, language must be simple enough to be appropriate and believable, and yet also special and fine enough to rise above the ordinary, indeed, to go beyond prose into a kind of poetry. O'Neill labored all his life to acquire this know-how, but achieved it only in his very last plays. Shelagh Delaney seems to have been born with it. "And me, I'm contemporary," says her heroine. "I really am, aren't I? I really do live at the same time as myself, don't I?" expressing thus in simple and

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fresh words a universal problem and her anxiety concerning it. And how touching it is when the young invert tries to be casual in justifying his living platonically with the girl whom he would like to marry: "Oh well, you need somebody to love you while you're looking for someone to love." But such lines are much more impressive when heard in their context which gives them their slightly raucous, bittersweet vibrancy. And even the humor in Miss Delaney's play is rich in suggestive ambiguity. Thus when the silly mother remarks: "I don't care for the cinema any more, it's getting more and more like the theatre," this is a three-pronged barb, puncturing simultaneously speaker, screen, and stage.

It is to be regretted that what was in England a more understated and subtle production, has been broadened and blunted here. Or just bloated: thus what the gigolo was pleased to pick up in England was "a couple of grapefruit on a 32-inch bust"; in the American version this becomes 38 inches, though, happily, the number of grapefruit remains two. Angela Lansbury's portrayal of the mother contributes nicely to this loss of subtlety. Miss Lansbury is comical enough, but one of the two directors should have explained to her that the stage of the Lyceum is not the Hollywood Bowl. As the daughter, that often superlative actress, Joan Plowright, is sometimes forced into exaggeration, as a man beside a waterfall must shout to make himself heard. But even so she manages, especially when Miss Lansbury is off stage, to rise to that overpowering simplicity which comes only from a profound understanding of one's art. But perhaps the most compelling performance of the evening is that of Andrew Ray as the troubled young artist. Mr. Ray accomplishes something as wonderful as it is economical: he simply plays the homosexual as a human being first, and envelops the incipient femininity in a youngster's angularity of movement, so that a wholly apposite coltishness overshadows the lack of masculinity. It is a performance both unusual and credible. This is the nature of the playwright's excellence, too: the quickening of the ordinary with an injection of the atypical that makes it survive the dangers of obviousness.

Irma la Douce, too, started out as a smaller, more delightful show in Paris, became bigger and more predictable in London, and has been divested of additional refinements for the benefit of Broadway. Nonetheless, compared to the new domestic musicals, it is a work of towering genius. It has its stretches of unfunniness, but achieves also a measure of genuine artistry. There is, first of all, the neat, all-encompassing, resourceful direction of Britisher Peter Brook, whose authority and ideas are ubiquitous and inexhaustible. Even when he resorts to old tricks, which he frequently and unashamedly does, they emerge rejuvenated by expertise. He is helped considerably by Rolf Gerard's sophisticated sets which move with the poise and agility of dancers, and by the evocative lighting. Seldom, moreover, have I heard such sure-fire

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orchestrations and vocal arrangements. Some of the songs are quite good, the lyrics are acceptable, the jokes and puns properly outrageous, in a few instances even making use of such big words as "André Gide." The plot happily manages to laugh at itself, and the musical wisely resolves itself into a series of loosely connected songs and skits. Part of its charm lies, for me, in its macaronic quality. Confronted with a song that begins: "There's no kyuah, foh lamooah," one feels at first in the realms of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. When reprised, "foh lamooah" becomes "follow *moi,*" and only at the next reprise (luckily all good things in *Irma* are milked and milked) does one unscramble the whole thing as: "There's no cure for *l'amour.*" All along one's ears are tickled by an "aural" Franco-English *entente cordiale,* with some Americana tossed in for good measure, and there's a feeling of well-being which is almost as much political as theatrical.

Nearly all the performers are talented and prepossessing, but Irma, played, sung, danced, and exuded by Elizabeth Seal, is an absolute peach, and if we weren't all such inveterate Prufrocks, would have been eaten long ago. The program lists sixteen men and one girl, but the moment Miss Seal appears on the stage, the ratio is reversed. From every cranny of the scenery Miss Seal crops up all at once, and when she is smack before you, splits up by near-atomic fissure into the most winning bevy of enchantresses. She was well on her way toward the Royal Ballet, we hear, when an injury to her ankle brought her to musical comedy—truly a case of the fortunate fall. Neither the unimaginative choreography nor the lapses in the writing can keep Miss Seal from proving that the artist, as Molière said of himself, takes his due wherever he finds it.

I shall mention briefly two insignificant comedies, *Under the Yum-Yum Tree,* and Arthur Laurents' *Invitation to a March.* The first is interesting only insofar as it demonstrates that however shoddy, disingenuous, indeed, vulgar a play may be, a masterly director (Joseph Anthony) can salvage with the help of a few snatches of comic dialogue and one or two able players enough fun to make one grant the play the indulgence usually reserved for an ingratiating B-grade movie. A similar reprieve might have been earned by Laurents' play, were it not that *Invitation to a March* is shot through with delusions of grandeur and pretends to offer answers when it does not even comprehend the questions adequately. Neither such poignant bits of dialogue as, "Schuyler, I rather love you.—I rather love *you,* Mother," nor such epigrams as "Maybe one day West Point will be a dancing school" (presumably the day after the world has become a giant neurological ward), do much more than shed light on the author's problem, and the whole notion of a contemporary Long Island setting for the Cinderella story with pseudo-Freudian overtones, is as dubious as it is creaky. The chief merit of the evening (besides some more than competent performances) is that it holds out in Jane Fonda the promise

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of a major actress to come, though she is already a delight to watch. Despite her studies with Lee Strasberg, Miss Fonda emerges as an individualistic, non-"method" talent—thanks, no doubt, to the paternal influence—so that the several cubic feet of American theatre surrounding her light up deliciously. To anyone choking on a surfeit of rasping-voiced, disheveled, hysteroid actresses, I offer Miss Fonda as that rare thing, a health-diet that is not less but more savory than the regular fare.

This brings me to the biggest blot on the scutcheon of this rather smudgy Broadway season. I refer to Tad Mosel's dramatization of James Agee's *A Death in the Family* under the title *All the Way Home*. Mr. Mosel, producer Fred Coe, and director Arthur Penn have all proved their mettle on previous occasions; here, however, they have combined to lay a roc's egg. About the play there is little to say except that novels do not gain by being dramatized, that complex, psychological novels bordering on prose poetry lose even more, and that Mr. Mosel simply wasn't up to the task. Much of what is moving in the book is—not always inevitably—missing, or coarsened, or painfully "explained." The play is largely alien to the spirit of Agee, obvious, and neither poetic nor dramatic. Scenes involving the older generations are handled creditably, but the middle-aged, the young, and the very young fare less well. The director must take the blame for, among other things, casting such inadequate players as Lillian Gish, Clifton James, and the excruciatingly inept Tom Wheatley; and also for entrusting the female and child leads to Colleen Dewhurst and John Megna, who, though skilled, are devoid of all charm. Among the principals, only Arthur Hill and Aline MacMahon are impressive, and there is a foursome of boys not one of whom would, in older and better days, have escaped the Tarpeian Rock.

More than anything else, *All the Way Home* is uninteresting. What is, however, interesting, is the bullying of the public into deferring to a coalition of pusillanimity, meretriciousness, bad taste, and sentimentalism. First the title was changed to *All the Way Home,* because one was scared witless that the word "death" would keep audiences away. *All the Way Home,* though an insipid title, would do very nicely because the initial A keeps it at the top of alphabetic listings. (This, of course, meant obscuring Agee's intentions and share in the work, thus actually decreasing the box-office appeal.) Next, because Fred Coe was unable to raise all the money, a co-producer was called in: Arthur Cantor, a press agent with the mentality of a press agent. The moment that the play, in spite of the reviewers' undiscerning and undeserved praise, began to fail with the audiences, Coe announced its closing, but Cantor's public-relations genius began to stir. He took out, together with Coe, large newspaper ads headlined "The Miracle on 44th Street," and proceeded to tell people what a superb play *All the Way Home* is, and that if only the cheering audiences would pass the word on, etc. etc.

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After every performance of the play Mr. Cantor began making curtain speeches about the beauty and fearlessness of this work and the glory it brings to the theatre, and if only everyone in the audience would tell all his friends, etc. etc. Direct mail campaigns were undertaken, and, as far as I can make it out, theatre people were invited to come and see and help this brave, lovely show.

I attended what was to have been the fourth and last performance. Needless to say, there were no press seats available to me, and Mr. Cantor assured us that even his grandmother had to pay, etc. etc. The names of those present would—to use a phrase doubtless dear to Mr. Cantor's heart—have read like a show-business who's who. Everybody seemed primed and forewarned that this was his chance to do his bit for his profession and colleagues, for the glory of the theatre, for the good of mankind. When Lillian Gish came on stage, herself the living proof of how sentimentalism can magnify into a star a saccharine silent-screen personality whose only skills are batting her eyelashes and uttering nauseating homespun truths in a voice dripping with prairie cuteness, a two-minute applause stopped whatever action there was in the play; similar outbursts occurred elsewhere, and Mr. Cantor's unctuous oration to praise the play, not to bury it, was greeted with more frenetic applause.

For it seems that in the interest of the theatre we must love everything, and if it is pretentious, vapid, and invokes high-sounding abstractions (and cost some goats a pretty penny), we must prostrate ourselves before it. Already the Cantor Plan has spawned similar campaigns, and several ghastly plays have tried or are trying to buy and browbeat their way to success. I can foresee the day when every street from Bleecker to 59th will have its own miracle, and the quality of plays will be determined by the amount and frequency of space bought in the newspapers. Current ads of Mr. Cantor's keep us regularly posted about how marvelously the word-of-mouth campaign has been working. As the late Professor Karl Viëtor remarked when Jaspers brought out his 1200-page book, *What Is Truth?:* "If that fellow knew what the truth is, he wouldn't need 1200 pages to tell it." When will Americans everywhere see through the public-relations and ad men who protest too much? When will the word of mouth be superseded by the word of brain?

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DENIS DONOGHUE

London Letter: Moral West End

In Fellini's film, *La Dolce Vita,* a wealthy, humane scholar named Steiner gives an 'evening'; it is attended by a number of fiendishly civilized Romans and a scandal-mongering journalist who has glimpsed finer things than bored women and errant princes. Scholar and journalist talk *sotto voce* about life and the silence of infinite spaces, about selfhood and freedom, about the possibility of being human. In the scholar the journalist finds his own conscience and a moral style now painfully beyond his possession but perhaps, with love, not utterly beyond his attainment. Later, the scholar shoots his two beloved children and himself. At this point the journalist gives up. What does all this mean? For once, let us heretically paraphrase the film as saying that you can't win, human life can't tolerate wisdom, you can't choose, you're caught.

Fellini's journalist, Marcello the malcontent, acts out his moral lesson for the diversion and edification of London audiences at the Columbia Theatre, Charing Cross Road. A few minutes away, at the Aldwych Theatre, the Stratford-on-Avon Company conspire with *The Duchess of Malfi* to present a similar account of life in blood and neon verse. Film and play devote themselves to lurid notations in the presumable absence of alternatives. Peggy Ashcroft discloses the Duchess playing a splendidly handsome role in her own melodrama, rising greatly to her own occasions; all very fine and so on, but the nays have it, lies, incestuous passion, adultery, poison, lycanthropy, monstrous circumstance, Belsen's golden grin. Webster's scandal-monger, Bosola, acts it out for us, singing a sick pop tune, 'You Can't Win.' Marcello looks with Italian boredom at the naked body of a woman who has teased herself out of her clothes at a party given to celebrate the annulment of her marriage.

I assume that in the House of Art there are many apartments, and that their separable functions are not exhausted by the following short list: to console us for the injury of birth, to 'imitate' human actions, to amuse us, to impede our complacency, to enact what it means to be human and extant. We grant the writer these offices. But can we be equally hospitable to all the values and attitudes implicit in the arts? Can any number play? Is it really true that in aesthetic arithmetic there is no cancelling? Are we honour-bound to consider values and attitudes only as neutral ingredients in a total composition? Suppose a writer consistently implies that human life is vile, that people are pigs or rhinoceroses, that choice and action are absurd; suppose he 'does dirt' on life; does this matter? If it does, we can hardly evade the

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embarrassment of saying so; the most we can manage is to establish some kind of moral-literary context in which the exposure of saying so is not too indecent. Thus Dr. Leavis cycles along, carrying a banner which reads "Reverence for Life."

Think of Harold Pinter. His published plays are *The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party* (all 1957) and *The Caretaker* (1959). In *The Room* Rose Hudd goes blind when her husband kicks and batters a blind negro who has insinuated himself into their lives with the admonition, "Come home, Sal." In *The Dumb Waiter* two gunmen, Gus and Ben, kill time in a basement room while waiting for their instructions; an envelope slides under the door, culinary orders arrive by dumb waiter, the final instruction is that Ben will kill Gus. In *The Birthday Party* two lodgers, Goldberg and McCann, interrogate and attack a third, Stanley Webber, on his birthday; at the birthday party, playing blind-man's-buff, Stanley, insane, tries to strangle Meg, who loves him. The following morning Goldberg and McCann take the imbecile away to be examined by a sinister and probably illusory figure called Monty. In *The Caretaker* an idiot, Aston, befriends an old man, Davies, gives him a bed and a corner of his room: words pass between them, words about negroes, soap, Sidcup, a pair of shoes, an insurance card, a jig saw, concealed identity, and the habits of women. Aston's brother, Mick, interrogates and attacks the old man: words pass between them, words about a leak in the roof, Sidcup, penthouses, clocks, décor. Davies draws a knife on Aston, proposes to change beds with him to avoid the draught, and is ejected, whimpering:

> I'll tell you what though . . . them shoes . . . them shoes you give me . . . they're working out all right . . . they're all right. Maybe I could . . . get down. . . . Listen . . . if I . . . got down . . . if I was to . . . get my papers . . . would you . . . would you let . . . would you . . . if I got down . . . and got my . . .

In these four plays there is not a single relationship for which an intelligent adult would give tuppence. What Pinter wrote four plays to say is not that life is sad, or that the heart is a lonely hunter, but that life is like two ambiguously connected figures who attack either each other or a third party. I mean to be prosaic about this. Such a view of life strikes me as untrue, not in accord with the facts insofar as I have encountered relevant facts, and—finally—arbitrary, unintelligent. During the first Act of *The Caretaker* at the Duchess Theatre I was reminded of Cummings' *HIM,* but the reminder was of contrast, for *HIM* is true and *The Caretaker* is false. *HIM* is more intelligent as well as more humane in disclosing the possibility of genuinely valuable relationships, of communication, of dialogue. There is in each play the blow of behaviour—yes, *The Caretaker* has striking moments of sheer gesture, when Davies says that he can't drink Guinness from a thick mug, when Aston talks about his head and the experience it

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has had, when Davies talks about shoes and says, "You can't beat leather . . ."—but *HIM* plays fair by life, and *The Caretaker* doesn't. *The Caretaker* lies when it says that people, their strictly essential selves (?), are morons, thugs, imbeciles, grunting their way through meaningless events. It is not enough to describe the play as a tragicomic parable of identity; it is falsely this, because the parable is rigged. A respectable playwright may argue that genuine communication is impossible—I don't believe him, but let him proceed in peace and goodwill—but he must not queer the issue by making Aston a headcase and his brother a moron. A modish dialectic is at work. The shadow of Samuel Beckett lurks behind Pinter's basements; indeed, to be England's Beckett may well be Pinter's role, a Watt-like walk down the Caledonian Road. By swift comparison with *Godot* and *All that Fall* even *The Caretaker* is rather thin; to assimilate is to masticate. At most, Beckett is guilty of bringing to the end of the line an insight which is good only as a marginal corrective. Pinter has the additional guilt of righteousness. It seems a proper moment to cite the massive commonsense of Henry James in the preface to *The Lesson of the Master:* elucidating the civic use of the imagination, James asks:

> How can one consent to make a picture of the preponderant futilities and vulgarities and miseries of life without the impulse to exhibit as well from time to time, in its place, some fine example of the reaction, the opposition or the escape?

Questions of choice, action, and dialogue are proposed again in *Billy Liar,* a play by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall based on Waterhouse's novel. The shadow of English domestic farce may be discerned in the wings, and most of the characters are to be found any evening in the green room of the B.B.C. Light Programme. The play becomes interesting only when we see Billy Fisher dreaming dreams rarely entertained in English domestic farce and never condoned by the Light Programme. Billy is Walter Mitty set down in a post-war-and-probably-pre-WAR Welfare State called England; the game is rougher than Thurber's, and Albert Finney's playing of Billy has to disengage itself from the chocolate coyness of Danny Kaye. That it does so is the triumph of Finney's performance; he engages our pity, but discourages any inclination to mother him. Billy is a boy-man for whom life has been inadequate, fitful where he wanted focus; so he supplies form and focus in daydreams, ideal but not abstract, trying to devise a reality for himself since he is unable to find one in life. Thus he invents a pointed décor for his scene; for his crude father the 'form' of a conscientious objector, for himself the role of Television Script-Writer of the Year, for his grandmother a military funeral as the Lady of the Lamp. I wish I could say that in Billy's dreams begin Billy's responsibilities, but here is the major defect of the play. Toward the end of the third Act Billy and Liz talk about going to London and

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getting married and having children. They arrange to meet at the station at eleven. Billy has a row with Mum and Dad, packs his bag, sets off—and slinks back. The play ends with Billy unpacking. Going to London with Liz stands for all the positive acts which a Billy Fisher might perform; he is not asked to be a saint or to replace Walter Winchell or to find the Abominable Snowman. But he can't go to London; at least he doesn't. Why not? He doesn't say, because he doesn't know. Presumably he could dream just as engrossingly in London as in Stradhoughton, so the answer is not that he can't break out of the closed circuit of an invented reality. London is not a dream; Liz, who knows about these matters, vouches for its existence. The only answer is the play's modish 'you can't win.' When Finney's Billy comes back home carrying his suitcase under his arm, his bowed shoulders make him look like a six-months' foetus: presumably he will revert to playing naval battles, as he once did, in a child's coffin.

"Then where do we look for our new vision?" The question is proposed not by Billy in *Billy Liar* but by Ronnie at the end of *I'm Talking about Jerusalem,* the last play in Arnold Wesker's trilogy. In *Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots,* and *Jerusalem* Wesker chronicles the struggles of the Kahn family to live the good Communist life. In the third Act of *Chicken Soup* Ronnie comes back from Paris, December 1956, post-Hungary: broken, he accuses his mother of concealing from him the doubts, the misgivings; it had seemed so fine served up as love, brotherhood, and freedom, but what about Hungary? Sarah sticks to her creed:

> All my life I worked with a Party that meant glory and freedom and brotherhood. You want me to give it up now? You want me to move to Hendon and forget who I am? If the electrician who comes to mend my fuse blows it instead so I should stop having electricity? I should cut off my light? Socialism is my light, can you understand that? A way of life. A man *can* be beautiful. . . .

For Sarah the Party means caring and loving and fighting everybody who doesn't care; and she begs Ronnie, "You've got to care, you've got to care or you'll die." In *Jerusalem* Dave and Ada, caring, leave London to live socialism in a Norfolk cottage: "What do you mean by happiness? It's the *doing,* the doing!" And to his apprentice Dave says:

> Look at it, the place where we work. The sun reaches us, we get black in the summer. And any time we're fed up we pack up and go swimming. Don't you realise what that means? There's no one climbing on our backs. Free agents Sammy boy. . . .

Three years later they move back to London: "if only we could squeeze a tiny victory out of it all," Ronnie moans, now that his prophet is dead and Spain is ancient myth and personal failure must be acknowledged:

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> Isn't that curious? I say all the right things, I think all the right things, but somewhere, some bloody where I fail as a human being....

So there it is. What this trilogy says is not that Communism is false but that even the 'truth' of Communism, if it were to obtain, would not automatically make a man free or whole. If visions don't work, the failure is a human failure, don't blame life: "Free agents Sammy boy." This strikes me as an adult acknowledgment, and it largely accounts for the resonance of this trilogy which persists after one has forgotten Ronnie's remarks about the Labour Party and Sir Winston's Sunday paintings. The play is concerned with man's own resources when the dream and the ball are over. Ronnie is trying to write a socialist novel, but Wesker has written a sturdy trilogy which should ring bells for anyone, Harold Macmillan included. Even Tories try to build Jerusalem, some kind of Jerusalem. Wesker's trilogy is a humane imitation of an action; it has the same kind of force as that splendid moment in *The Entertainer* when Archie Rice, explaining his own failure, invokes the memory of a great negress, in a bar, standing up and singing and defining her entire being in the song. These are not cheery-beery affirmations, slogans painted on a humanist bandwagon; they are precise formulations, acts in a human scene.

The acts and the attendant sufferances, of course, are fairly simple in these cases; Wesker and Osborne have not engaged really complex material. In *Ross* Terence Rattigan attempts a 'dramatic portrait' of T. E. Lawrence and the material is—or should have been—so complex that even a creditable failure would be acceptable. During the play I was reminded of the passage in *The Tragic Muse* where Gabriel Nash talks about the old dramatists, the large loose men who didn't defer to their audiences. I find it in Chapter IV, the conversation with Peter; Gabriel has remarked that a character in a play is such a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on: "the dramatist shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience," is restricted to "so poor an analysis." And then of the old dramatists:

> Besides, they had a simpler civilisation to represent—societies in which the life of man was in action, in passion, in immediate and violent expression. Those things could be put upon the playhouse boards with comparatively little sacrifice of their completeness and their truth. Today we're so infinitely more reflective and complicated and diffuse that it makes all the difference.

Some difference, anyway. A great deal of Lawrence's life was in action and passion, in immediate and violent expression, but even more of it was in his sense of those actions, passions, and expressions, what he made of them at the time and later in his own wilderness. *Ross* has nothing of this. But it is as much drama's limitation as Rattigan's

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failure: for many kinds of inward event the drama is a halting and approximate medium. One extreme instance will make the point. The sexual assault upon Lawrence at Deraa Station is given discreetly in the play, offstage; then the victim crawls across the stage, is attacked (verbally) by the Turkish Military Governor, groans to his feet, and stumbles out. Alec Guinness plays this flawlessly; but it is nothing compared to the narrative of the same event in Chapter LXXX of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. I give only a few sentences:

> I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up; and this was true, for the next day my right side was dark and lacerated, and a damaged rib made each breath stab me sharply. I remembered smiling idly at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was swelling through me: and then that he flung up his arm and hacked with the full length of his whip into my groin.

Gabriel was right. Curiously, the limitations of drama throw some light upon Lawrence's own tragedy; was it not his failure to find an adequate objective correlative for the life of his psyche? He failed to compose his own tragedy. He devised forms within which his public acts would show a portentous significance, but he knew that these were totally irrelevant to his more private self. And he had unfitted himself for the acquisition or the formulation of others. Nothing short of an Absolute would satisfy him:

> Somewhere there must be an Absolute; that is the only thing that counts: and I can't succeed in finding it. Hence this impression of existence without an object.

All this accounts, I believe, for the emaciation of Rattigan's 'dramatic portrait.' His Lawrence makes several clever remarks, and one fine speech in which he accuses himself of worshipping his own will, "the false god," but he is nothing more than a middle-class enigma. The Lawrence of the first Act is 'placed' about half-way between *Hassan* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* straight-man to the resident comic Auda Abu Tayi: after the assault he slips into a more sombre pigeonhole, but Hollywood could turn him into a popular film without much difficulty. Far out in *Seven Pillars* Lawrence mentions that he found it hard to straddle feeling and action; but the attempt is there, in *The Mint,* in the letters, momentously in *Seven Pillars* itself. There is none of it in *Ross,* "so poor an analysis." At the end of the play Lawrence packs his R.A.F. bag and slips off quietly, an engaging minor Stoic for whom action now consists of a 'good performance.' Many years ago, in an essay on "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," T. S. Eliot suggested a relation between a theatre of declamation and a morality of postures, the ethic of Seneca's drama being that of "an age which made up for the lack of moral habits by a system of moral attitudes and poses." The ethic of Seneca is "a matter

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of postures; and the posture which gives the greatest opportunity for effect, and hence for the Senecan morality, is the posture of dying." Rattigan's tight-lipped Lawrence does not declaim, but he makes his *persona* and his rhetoric out of brittle responses to the declamations of others; his silences thus take on a Stoic cast. To the newsman Dickinson—Bosola without tears—Lawrence speaks of his ejection from the R.A.F. as death, and like a good Stoic hero he 'dies' well. His quiet voice, his generosity toward Evans, his wry abstentions; these have the same purpose and a little of the same effect as Vittoria's vision of herself, in *The White Devil,* as a frail ship in a black storm. Attitude is given as worthy substitute for action. Character becomes 'picturesque.'

Gabriel said that a character in a play was a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on. He was right. But as soon as you have two, the poetic possibilities crowd in, possibilities of mutuality, dialogue, silence. Three boards and a passion are not enough; you need three boards and two passions. These are the materials available in *Chin-Chin,* a new play by Francois Billet-doux, adapted by Willis Hall. Cesareo Grimaldi and Pamela Puffy-Picq meet by arrangement in a Paris tea-shop: Pamela's husband has taken as his mistress Cesareo's wife. Pamela and Cesareo share nothing but the residual and insoluble pain. They are helpless, without even the consolation of glamour. But their need is bigger than both of them. Gradually from inconsequential meetings the consequences accrue; by the end of the second Act hero and heroine are inextricable. It is not Hollywood's idea of young or even middle-aged love; squalor, talk, dowdiness, and alcohol punctuate its phrases. This relationship does not solve the human needs; rather, it clears a frightening space for them by eliminating the entire outside world, except for Pamela's son Bobby and the spectres of the faithless. The talk and the alcohol are compulsive, answering to some imperative without allaying the distemper: there is a beautiful moment in the third Act when Cesareo, longing for sweet, placid dialogue, tries to talk to a chair in Pamela's apartment; and another in the same garrulous pad when Cesareo comes upon Bobby's punch-ball and wallops away at the world's leather, horribly resilient face. Anthony Quayle's Cesareo is a brilliant invention; this large, lumpy man speaks in acute angles of remonstrance and interrogation, an instinctual man who knows none of the answers. If Hollywood were to buy him at all, it would have him shack up with a comfortable blond: *Chin-Chin,* instead, gives him Celia Johnson's Pamela, nervous, angular, an English tea-drinker gone alcoholic. These two stumble along by clinging to each other. In the last Scene, at dawn, on a quai along the Seine, they come upon Bobby lying drunk on the pavement. Tipsy, they talk a little to him, steal his money, and walk off, laughing without gaiety. The parody is grimly touching; 'young love in Paris,' constrained thirty years and then boarded out in an anti-novel by Robbe-Grillet; Adam and Eve taking their solitary, obsessional way toward Skid Row. What

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does the theft mean? I take it as the final gesture by which Pamela and Cesareo repudiate the 'outside' world and all its works and pomps. Even its good works and its genial pomps: hero and heroine will have nothing of a world which has served them thus. If they have nothing left but themselves, why should they sustain values which they have not invented, which come from 'that' world over there?

Pamela and Cesareo are obviously reduced; but to what? To bare, human essentials? Hardly. Only a brutal parable would teach that honesty and fair-dealing are mere social devices to be shelved like the rest in a surly time. What then? In the performance which I attended, the last moments were played with the suggestion that the one essential fact was the persistence of these two tipsy people, man and woman, together. Everything else, including the densely unpopulated block of apartments, seemed unreal. Thus man and woman walked tipsily into a spectral future. But we were given no indication of the new-minted values which they would use for the new hazard; we were not told whether those values would bear any relation to the old, rejected ones; nothing at all. It was all pathetic and touching, but as a human notation a little glib, coy: it is too late in the evening for cute notations which pretend to say a great deal without producing an endorsing syntax. Any syntax, in fact. The really fine play would now be written, showing Pamela and Cesareo as they 'are' now and the dreams or forms or values by which they live or partly live.

The English playwright who has pondered these matters most devotedly is Robert Bolt, author of *A Man for All Seasons* and *The Tiger and the Horse*. I do not think that Bolt is a born dramatist, but he has taken some pains to eke out his birthright. He is a perceptive man, and he writes fine speech; he probably writes splendid essays. The trouble is that he shows little flair for human behaviour, for the sheer blow of gesture, and he seems to grasp human action only when it is on the point of disclosing its own form, or when it has already done so. He is insensitive to the unpredictable; he could not have written *The Caretaker,* which is all behaviour. But he asks the proper question: what is a man? He reminds us in his scholarly preface to *A Man for All Seasons* that we no longer have any image of man by which to recognise ourselves and against which to measure ourselves. We are anything: "but if anything, then nothing, and it is not everyone who can live with that, though it is our true present position." Thinking thus, Bolt is fascinated by a man like Sir Thomas More, who lived deeply in his own place and time according to a formulated image of man. In one of the most cogent paragraphs of the preface Bolt writes:

> At any rate, Thomas More, as I wrote about him, became for me a man with an adamantine sense of his own self. He knew where he began and left off, what area of himself he could yield to the encroachments of his enemies, and what to the encroachments of those

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he loved. It was a substantial area in both cases for he had a proper sense of fear and was a busy lover. Since he was a clever man and a great lawyer, he was able to retire from those areas in wonderfully good order, but at length he was asked to retreat from that final area where he located his self. And there this supple, humorous, unassuming and sophisticated person set like metal, was overtaken by an absolutely primitive rigour, and could no more be budged than a cliff.

Bolt's play is a view from the cliff: it chronicles the events leading to More's death via dialectical encounters with Wolsey, William Roper, Norfolk, Cromwell, the good Alice, the randy King. Here is the metal being tapped by a royal hammer:

More: When I took the Great Seal your Majesty promised not to pursue me on this matter.

Henry: Ha! So I break my word, Master More! No no, I'm joking . . . I joke roughly . . . I often think I'm a rough fellow. . . . Yes, a rough young fellow. Be seated. . . . That's a magnolia. We have one like it at Hampton—not so red as that though. Ha!—I'm in an excellent frame of mind. . . . Beautiful. . . . You must consider, Thomas, that I stand in peril of my soul. It was no marriage; she was my brother's widow. Leviticus: "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife." Leviticus, Chapter 18, Verse 16.

More: Yes, Your Grace. But Deuteronomy—

Henry: Deuteronomy's ambiguous! . . .

It is fine speech. I noticed that many of the formal occasions later on in the play are paraphrased from Nicholas Harpsfield's *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More,* but they are none the worse for that, and fall winningly. In several of the keenest speeches More has been his own script-writer and Bolt the agile manipulator of scissors and paste.

Bolt had an easier assignment with More than Rattigan with Lawrence, because a greater amount of More's life—what James would call his felt life—attained form in the exhibited action. The result is a firmer portrait and a more ample play. More was a greater man than Lawrence, but also a simpler man. And yet hardly as simple as Bolt makes him. The sense of an unique personality is not, strangely, one of the pleasures of meeting this hero: Bolt has endowed him with silence and cunning, but surely More must have doubted, must have felt the horror if not the boredom. In the play he has exactly as much reality as what he stands for, but nothing more; he is a hero for Fast Days. In Paul Scofield's performance I had the feeling that the role was too thin for the actor; it was rather like Eliot's Thomas, a bit lean, schematic. Yes, I know that the character, the agent, exists for the sake of the action, and I have learnt from Francis Fergusson something of the meaning of action, but if a dramatist exhibits most of his meaning

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through one man's acts and sufferances, that man had better seem rich in personality. And clearly Aristotle allows for this.

Bolt deals with these matters again in *The Tiger and the Horse* (Blake: "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction") but now through a modern situation. The question persists: what is a man? More knew the answer, or at least an answer sufficiently good and dangerous for the life of his own time, but academic Jack Dean spends nearly three Acts of a play trying to evade the question. He moves from attitude to act, the act repudiating the attitude or incorporating it only as a vigilante in the new commitment. At the beginning of the play he lives in the protection if not the comfort of dry abstentions, carrying a considerable irony to the end of a very refined line. By the end of the second Act he is still fending off commitments, though the stance is now remarkably shabby: to his favorite daughter Stella, who has informed him that she is pregnant through the courtesy of lower-middle-class Louis Flax, Jack says, "I'm not involved. I'm exceedingly distressed on your behalf, my dear, but I am not involved." So the first assault upon his impermeability fails. The second succeeds: Jack's wife Gwen, now that her marriage-dialogue has gone amiably dumb, goes temporarily insane and slashes a priceless Holbein. Enter the tigers of wrath, Jack 'speaks,' and the dialogue is resumed. This paraphrase is unfair to Bolt, it makes his play sound like *The Burning Glass* or something. But the play is thin. It says many of the right things; it endorses moral choice, dialogue, love; it is on the side of life. If only it could manage to make life seem more vital. . . . In several respects *The Tiger and the Horse* rewrites *Look Back in Anger* in a cooler and more intelligent spirit. Osborne's play was dishonest because it allowed eloquence and energy to only one attitude, Jimmy Porter's; rival attitudes were assigned to nitwits. Bolt's play is more honest, more generous, and if this means that the upper-middle-class can afford to be nice to the lower-middle-class, well and good, but there is more to it than that. At the beginning of the play Louis Flax knows all his own answers, without having attended to the questions of others: at the end, he has learnt, developed, come to understand the meaning of a commitment. This is fine. But again an essayist could have done it. At least Osborne is a dramatist. Perhaps Bolt's play is the result of trying to imitate a lifelike action despite a lifeless professor. The shot of adrenalin in the last Act is never enough.

I suppose this means giving Bolt's plays the limp handshake normally available to intelligence and good intention, while hoping that adrenalin will presently be more plentiful. But there it is. I happened to see *The Tiger and the Horse* within a few days of *Shadows,* John Cassavetes' improvisation. *Shadows* has plenty of adrenalin, and it fairly bristles with behaviour; it's all movement, gesture, unpredictable, a girl and her lover running away from her boy-friend, a decent pop vocalist trying to compete with the floosies in a night spot, a lively party that goes noisy, a boy cutting a crazy path through city traffic at

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night. But the film sets these events striving toward the condition of form, and the energy at work is that of an intelligent and humane mind saying that even if we don't know what a man is we ought to persist as if we did and we ought to behave in certain ways in preference to other ways. So the three boys, beaten on a girl-caper, question each other, and one of them, Benny, gets a new idea, chooses, and quietly acts upon the choice. Life persists, and discloses at least a few dignified possibilities. So the hurt girl hurts her caller, is rebuked, accepts the challenge, and dances with him now with love. Is this a sentimental lie? The dance is probably as much reality as boy or girl could bear, and it is not everything, but that it is genuine communication there can be no doubt. How can we square this with, say, Beckett's assumption that in the case of human intercourse "we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject's, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation": hence "the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture. . . ." Are we talking about the same thing? Beckett uses the word "communication," but he seems to be thinking of something quite different, something that D. H. Lawrence saw in Poe's heroes and heroines, the vampiric grip of soul upon soul. And this is murder. Cassavetes' girl trusts in dialogue; I agree with her; I am content not to be God.

A few generalizations would be customary at this point, to bring these matters to an inconclusive conclusion. I shall honour the custom with one; that the serious plays featured in the recent London season are concerned, in their varying degrees, with the nature of the self, with identity, with the hazard of the relation—assuming some relation—between the self and the Other, with dialogue. At the very least, these plays are involving themselves in the great preoccupation of poetry and fiction since the French Revolution, what Lionel Trilling calls "the opposing self." It is a fact worth recording. None of these plays seems to me to offer any novel answers to the predicament of the self, and I should guess that a thoughtful reader of nineteenth-century fiction would consider it unnecessary to consult the London theatre in his search for light. I do not expect to meet F. R. Leavis or Yvor Winters walking purposefully down Shaftesbury Avenue. But human notations are available even there. Everybody has noted the brilliant ensemble playing of Alan Bates, Peter Woodthorpe, and Donald Pleasence in *The Caretaker;* but a terrifying human point is made when this mesh of voices and gestures underlines the failure of dialogue, the grotesque formula of communication. You have to see this before you can register it, and you can't see it at all without going to the theatre and buying a ticket and proceeding inside. But it is worth the bother. It is not the whole truth, but a little something understood.

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NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Bergman Springs Again

THE WORD ON THE LATEST BERGMAN FILM,[1] the word made flesh or at least *Time,* is that he has gone religious, that Bergman's ecclesiastical and apparently somewhat stern upbringing has finally taken hold of him again, and the minister's famous son has turned back to the faith of his father. Certainly, had Carl Dreyer made *The Virgin Spring,* we would have no doubts. Based on a thirteenth-century ballad, the film tells of a farmer, his wife, and his daughter Karin. The girl sets out to church but on the way is raped and murdered by wildmen three. Then they (somewhat foolishly, I thought, since they don't know whose daughter she is) try to sell the girl's clothing—to the farmer. In a wild fury he kills the outlaws and seeks out the girl's body in the woods; there, he repents his wrath and promises to build a shrine to her. At that moment, a spring of clear water miraculously wells forth from the bloodstained ground.

Pretty clearly, the film deals with Christian subject-matter. The "good guys" in the film, the farmer, his wife, Karin herself, and various hands about the farm are all Christian; the "bad guys," the rapists and the dark, slatternly stepsister whose illegitimate pregnancy contrasts with the virgin's chastity, are either irreligious or pagan, holding to the old faith, Odin-worship. More Christian tone comes in through Bergman's use of an iconographic technique like that of *The Seventh Seal.* Karin's ordeal takes place on a Friday in spring. Selling her clothing is not unlike dicing for Christ's robe. The girl wears the clothing traditionally associated with the Virgin, blue, red, and gold skirts, blue shoes with roses and pearls on them (this time Bergman does not mention wild strawberries).[2] The farmer slays the two rapists with the fire and sword threatened the impious in Isaiah. The two rapists themselves, thieves of the girl's chastity and rich clothing, die in attitudes of crucifixion; the more or less innocent boy who is with them, in effect, suffers between two thieves. My friends and colleagues assure me that the bearded

[1] *Jungfrukällen.* Directed by Ingmar Bergman. Production: Svensk Filmindustri. Script: Ulla Isaksson and Ingmar Bergman. Photography: Sven Nykvist. Max von Sydow plays the father; Birgitta Valberg, the mother. Birgitta Pettersson and Gunnel Lindblom act the fair sister and the dark sister respectively.

[2] Since reviewing *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries* (*HR,* Summer and Winter, 1959), I have learned that in medieval herbals the strawberry symbolized perfect righteousness. When associated with the Virgin, as in those films and Bergman's earlier (1950) *Sommarlek* or *Illicit Interlude,* strawberries represented the good works of the righteous or "fruits of the spirit." Bergman tends to identify them with a mammary or sexual life-force just as generally, he tends to psychologize traditional Christianity. In other words, Bergman's strawberries are still "wild." Strawberries, in fact, were not cultivated until the fourteenth century—shortly after Christianity irrevocably replaced the old Norse religions in Sweden.

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farmer, as played by the ubiquitous Max von Sydow, looks like Christ (though I would have said Abe Lincoln). On his chair, there is a round dingus that gives the effect of a halo with the result that shots of the family and farmhands at table look like an underpopulated Last Supper (in keeping, again, with an iconic medieval view, that every meal figures the Mass).

Nevertheless, Bergman is not Dreyer. "To me," he writes,

> religious problems are continuously alive. I never cease to concern myself with them; it goes on every hour of every day. Yet this does not take place on the emotional level, but on an intellectual one. Religious emotion, religious sentimentality, is something I got rid of long ago—I hope. The religious problem is an intellectual one to me: the relationship of my mind to my intuition.

And Ulla Isaksson, the Swedish novelist who collaborated with Bergman on the script for *The Virgin Spring* (and the earlier *Brink of Life*), notes that the film "can be experienced several ways depending on the person who sees it." Furthermore, in the context of the film itself, no purely Christian interpretation will do. In the forest, the virgin shares a meal of highly symbolic bread and beer with her murderers-to-be, but there is a horrible parody of the living bread when a toad pops out of the loaf. "The toad," says Mrs. Isaksson, "is of course a kind of underworld symbol." The image seems to say even more that the old ugliness is still inside, hidden. The Christians are not really as good as they seem. Proud in their faith, singularly uncharitable (except for the virgin herself) to Ingeri, the riggish stepsister carrying her unborn illegitimate child, praying every morning that no "shame" will come on their family, the household is entirely too stiff-necked. The mother's mortifying her flesh with the hot wax from the votive candle seems to me, as to the farmer himself, a bit much, and he, though he may begin as a haloed Christ, in the wild, cold rage in which he murders the thieves, must have become something else.

That something else concerns the old faith of Odin or Wotan, a religion not of love and mercy but of the dark forces of sex and hate within man. The despised Ingeri represents this religion within the very house of the Christians, and her hate and lust smolders despite their attempts to stamp it out. The picture opens with her kindling the household fire and praying to Odin. Later, casting an Odinic spell, she hides a toad as a cantrip in a loaf of bread Karin will carry when she rides to church to bring candles for the Virgin. To Ingeri's distress, Karin asks her to come along and get out of the house a while (the pious family has been hiding the very-obviously-pregnant Ingeri at home). Together, they come to a stream; Karin crosses over, but Ingeri, frightened, fearing the spell she has cast, stays behind with the nameless troll-like man who lives in a hut beside the stream.

He, it turns out, belongs to the same lodge as Ingeri; he also sacrifices

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to Odin. One-eyed, as Odin was, having paid an eye for second sight, the old man divines both Ingeri's charm and the outcome, "Three dead men rode north," which he (and we) hear as the Wotan-sound of riders in the sky. His hut, all too briefly shown, sets up a number of Christian-pagan contrasts. His great chair adorned with figures of Odin and Tor reminds us of the farmer, Töre's, haloing high-seat. The farmer's eaves carry crosses, the troll's, phallic emblems. Water gushes through the hut as water will gush from the virgin spring. And there is still another parallel: he tries to rape Ingeri.

She, however, gets away and flees across the stream into the dark forest, the Other World, where Karin has gone. The girl, meanwhile, meets her fate in the form of three men herding goats, one a silent boy, one a babbling man whose tongue has been cut out, the third playing like a diseased Pan a jew's harp handed down from father to son. As the hidden Ingeri watches, Karin shares her meal of bread and beer with them. Inflamed by the beer, the three begin to circle around her. She pleads her sacred mission, carrying candles to the Virgin, but at that moment the toad appears from within the loaf, its sides throbbing as though distended with passion, and they rape her. Ingeri had picked up a stone to intervene (thus providing us with a New Testament bit about bread and stone), but even as she is horrified by her inaction, her hatred of Karin holds her back. This hatred and her earlier escape from the troll would seem to say that Odin, as *juju,* has it all over the Virgin.

At any rate, the thieves, having killed the girl and stolen her rich clothes, appear at the farmer's house to beg for shelter, bringing, as it were, that other, dark world of Odin into the Christian world. When the farmer sees Karin's clothes and realizes what has happened, he flies into a singularly Wotanic and un-Christian rage. He tears a birch sapling out of the earth, opening up the underworld so to speak; tears off his clothes even as his faith; and purifies his naked self, thrashing his bare body with the branches in a kind of ritual bath. Then, aided by his pious wife, he murders the murderers, they becoming in their dying attitudes Christs, as he has become Wotan. (Bergman treats Wotan or Odin not so much as the Zeus-like figure of the Germanic tradition, but in a more primeval sense as the god of fury and madness —as in Middle English *wod,* mad, or modern German, *wüten,* to enrage; the root has also to do with Latin *vates* or Old Irish *fáith,* poet or seer; the rapists themselves are, in the old word, woodwoses, wild men of the forest, Wotanned men, proto-beats.)

The Virgin Spring, then, deals not with one religion, but two, a new religion of forgiveness and restraint giving way to an older, deeper religion of fury and revenge. In a sense, mediating between these two orders is the figure of Persephone (or, since the girl's name is Karin, perhaps I should speak of Kore). In fact, the poet of the film calls her "the Queen of the May," and throughout, she is identified with

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the budding spring. The film contains a full complement of feminine archetypes, the Virgin-Harlot, the Mother, and the Crone, and like Faulkner's *Sanctuary* or the Alice books or *Titus Andronicus* it is firmly rooted in the underworld of Persephone. The heroine, carrying a precious treasure (the candles for the Virgin, in this case, or her rich clothing or, ultimately, her innocence) passes from the world of civilization and authority (that pious father-dominated Christian farm) through a barrier (the stream and its nameless troll-guardian) into a dark, chthonic otherworld. There, she indicates her participation by eating and is ravished. Out of that rape and its aftermath springs a new, fertile, creating synthesis of the two worlds. The spring welling up from the ground heralds the seasonal spring (though the English pun does not work in Swedish). Other elements in the rape of Karin echo parts of the Eleusinian mysteries associated with Persephone or Kore. The rape and murder take place on, almost *in* the earth beside barren branches; her picnic with her tormentors suggests the drinking of *kykeon* and the eating of the sacred cakes (Fryed cakes, I suppose).

Now all this talk about myth, while a necessary, even ritual gesture on the part of a modern critic, tells us, if anything, something about that thirteenth-century ballad the film is based on, its significance or appeal; the myth tells us nothing about Bergman's film qua film. *The Virgin Spring,* in C. L. Barber's admirable phrase, "controls magic by reunderstanding it as imagination." For one thing, Bergman has endowed the shadowy, symbolic figures of the ballad with human qualities. In one scene, for example, he shows us the almost sexual tone of the father's love for his daughter (the jealous mother standing ominously at the edge of the film frame). He thus allows us to supply a motive for the father's insistence that the daughter risk the journey and a further motive (if one is needed) for his fury—the herdsmen have done what he, unconsciously, wished to do; they have broken through, penetrated, *his* inhibition. In the same way, the mother's mortification of her flesh could be the reaction of a woman who feels she was not good enough to hold her husband's love; she herself admits at the end that she resented Karin's relationship with her husband. Possibly her spoiling the girl represents an over-compensation for this resentment, as her husband's strictness is an over-compensation for his affection for the girl. In Ingeri, herself an addition to the story, we see another human quality pasted on, as it were, to the primitive legend: her jealousy of Karin, her resentment of the virgin's wealth and purity, a jealousy made all the more infuriating by the fact that Karin is the only one in the Christian household who treats Ingeri at all decently. And Karin herself, despite her allegorical and mythic qualities, shows all the whims and coquetries of the average bobby-soxer.

In addition to motivations of this sort, Bergman has also tacked on the ballad an almost Shakespearean tapestry of images. One cluster involves food, clothing, and shelter, the things the basest beggar needs,

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the things that say man's life is *not* as cheap as beast's. By contrast, Karin moans like an animal after the rape; dying, her eyes roll up like a stunned cow's, and the angry young men strip her as though they were skinning a rabbit. The enraged farmer chooses a slaughtering-knife instead of a sword to kill the rapist-animals. As against this animality, food, clothing, and shelter suggest civilization—the girl must dress up to go to church; the woodwoses or wild men steal the girl's clothing as part of her civilized virtue; they beg shelter and food from the civilized farmer. When he learns what they have done, he pulls Karin's clothing out of their bags piece by piece as if to feed his revenge, as if the civilized clothing in some sense symbolized the essence of the crime. Clothing and shelter also beget overtones of inhibition, repression, the discontents of civilization, the ways the dreary, gray world of the Christian farm puts down all violent, pagan expressions of love and hate. "First," the farmer says when he learns who his guests are, "first, I want to bar the manor hall." "It is already done," his wife replies.

Food, even more than clothing or shelter, plays a symbolic role. Repeatedly, we see the family at meals. We see the girl share her bread and beer with the rapists, and it is by the fact that the farmer says the same grace as the dead girl that the boy with the rapists realizes whose house they are in.

As one would expect from the interest in food, mouths are important. At the farmhouse, there is a beggar-monk, almost a poet, half-crazed or touched by God—Odin, as custodian of the *furor poeticus,* was the god of poetry as well as of rage. The poet's words, like the troll's, foretell the future; he has a mark on his lips; he sucks eggs. One of the rapists is mute; the other enchants Karin with the music from his jew's harp. Blood runs out of Karin's mouth; later, out of the boy's when the wild men beat him to silence. At one point, the mouth of the boy becomes the moral spokesman of the film when, after the rape, he cannot eat for guilt at the things he knows are inside him.

Inside-and-outside, the idea permeates and informs the film: clothing and shelter as against the stripping and the forced entrance of the rape; the child within Ingeri waiting to come out as against the barrier of Karin's virginity; food prepared by women going into the mouth as against words prepared by men coming out. Word and flesh, in this devious way in *The Virgin Spring,* are indeed one—through the mouth. Bergman is saying that the darkness within us and the darkness outside are the same. "For us, who made *The Virgin Spring,*" writes Ulla Isaksson, "it is a story about human distress, man's powerlessness against the evil within him as well as around him." Bergman, in other words, has not simply created a cowboys-and-Indians, Christian-and-pagan, Cecil B. DeMille image of man as good or evil (choose one). He has shown us the dark, inner world of our spirit, our pagan unconscious, enclosed in an outer world of civilization, Christianity,

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and restraint. Our mouths are the bridge between these two worlds.

It is fitting, then, that the theme of *The Virgin Spring* should emerge most clearly in two speeches. In the first, the beggar-poet touched by God speaks to the mute and frightened boy in the farmhouse. He looks up at the smoke from the hearthfire pouring out through the opening in the roof and says,

> Do you see how the smoke trembles up there in the vent? As if it were moaning and frightened. . . . Yet it only goes out into the air, and out there it has all of space to wheel around in. But it doesn't know it. That's why it crouches and trembles in here under the sooty ridge of the roof. . . . It's the same with human beings. They tremble and worry like a leaf in the storm—because they know, and because they don't know.

The poet goes on to give a lurid description of the hell waiting murderers and rapists, but then in a sudden change of mood, he says to the terrified boy, "At the same moment when you think you are lost, a hand will grasp you and an arm will be placed around you and you will be taken far away where evil can no longer harm you." There is some irony, I suppose, in the fact that the arm which does embrace the boy and take him far away is the brawny arm of the farmer, dashing his brains out against the wall.

The second key speech is the farmer's at the clearing where his daughter lies. He looks up to heaven and cries, "You saw it, God! You saw it! The death of an innocent child, and my vengeance. You permitted it and I don't understand You. Yet I now ask you for forgiveness—I do not know of any other way to reconcile myself with my own hands. I don't know of any other way to live." And he vows to build a church with his own hands. As if to answer him, the virgin spring gushes forth from the earth, and surging up with it comes all the symbolic force of what has gone before.

"The 'Spring,' " Ulla Isaksson writes, "which wells forth from the bloodstained ground is a sign of God's mercy." Maybe so, but frankly, the spring seems to me rather an image of release, the bursting-through of those inhibited forces underground, like the smoke out the roof or the rushing waters in the troll's hut or the father's vengeance or, for that matter, the rape itself. *The Virgin Spring,* I think, is not by any means an unequivocally Christian film. The men, the farmer and the poet, do appeal to the abstract God of the sky, but the women accept baptism for the dead Karin and for Ingeri bearing new life from the waters of buried life surging out of the earth. Together the father's shrine and the virgin's spring image man's religion as *cathedra super Acherontem,* a religion covering the chthonic, Odinic forces of love and death within us and outside us, perhaps, too, enclosing and reconciling them, giving them expression.

Expression, however, poses problems in *The Virgin Spring.* An

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anonymous critic suggests as Bergman's recurring theme, "the conviction that the purpose of crime and cruelty is that redemption may ultimately be won," rather like the proverbial jewel in the toad's head. The first three sequences of the film, all associated with fire, parts of the body, and worship, do indeed give us such a theme. First, we see a crime: Ingeri, her gravid belly blatantly in the way, starts up the fire on the hearth and prays in hate to Odin. Second, we see another kind of crime: Karin's parents pray to the crucified Christ; the mother mortifies her flesh, burning her wrist with the hot wax from the votive candle. Third, we see redemption, Bergman's recurring praise of life against the religions of death: Frida, an old farmwoman, rubbing her swollen, painful legs, brings in some baby chicks to the hearthfire, "to live out your miserable life as surely as God allows all of us to live." The film gives us the same tripartite structure in the three journeys through the woods: Karin's in love; Ingeri's in hate; the parents' in reconciliation. Again, there are three crucial places in the film: the Christian farm, the Odinic hut, and the clearing in the woods where the limestone church, the *cathedra super Acherontem,* will stand.

While there is this triadic structure and rhythm, the film seems also to make a simple gesture of doing and undoing, moving, for example, from the fire of the opening shot to the quenching water of the close, from the opening prayer to Odin to the closing prayer to a Christian God. We first see Karin in bed, sleeping late, then being dressed; we last see her undressed, bedded in the earth, sleeping late in another sense. And then there are just plain old-fashioned symbols, tossed in like sops to Cerberus, the four elements, earth, air (smoke), fire, and water, or the preoccupation with primal scene fantasies, the boy and Ingeri watching the rape, the boy and the mother watching the struggle between the father and the rapists. As in *Wild Strawberries,* Bergman's thematic focus seems to have blurred.

Expression in *The Virgin Spring* poses another problem. Possibly Bergman's literary background has erupted like the virgin's spring; possibly the film reflects the alien presence of the collaborator on the screenplay; possibly it shows the absence of Bergman's regular cameraman, Gunnar Fischer. In any case, it seems to me, very little of the film's significance comes into being through purely filmic means (notably montage and editing); very much through the story and dialogue. The camera work is, as always, impeccable; Bergman has exquisitely framed his shots—notably the series of intense and extreme close-ups that give us the beggar's key speech, but there is none of the breathtaking beauty of *The Seventh Seal.* Emotionally, the film virtually overpowers its audience, though it is hard to see how a film that puts before us in considerable detail four murders and a rape could fail to. The rape scene itself (which everybody says has been cut to spare the tender sensibilities of America's untouchables) gives exactly the violence and penetration the theme of the film demands; it is difficult to

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see what has been left out. Nevertheless, something is missing from *The Virgin Spring:* the feeling of mystery and wonder I have come to associate with Bergman's work. The film's fictive level is too done, too complete in itself, the story too straightforwardly, too directly told. The only unrealism occurs in the final miracle (like the candybox Cupid who ends *Lesson in Love*). I miss the style of *The Seventh Seal* and *The Magician* where the continuing mystery of the surface story steadily and relentlessly insisted that we aspire to another, symbolic level of response. I miss the sense of live issues.

Of course, this is merely perfectionist carping. *The Virgin Spring* stands firmly among the three or four best of Bergman's films, and that in turn places it among the finest films of the last quarter-century, even if Bergman did sacrifice the graven image, a little, to the word.

B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Opera Chronicle

MUSORGSKY AND BERLIOZ were the two outstanding originals of the nineteenth century; and in the work of each, what was individual was judged to be evidence of incompetence. But nobody took it on himself to improve Berlioz's melody, harmony and rhythm, and to publish and perform his revision in place of Berlioz's own work; whereas Rimsky-Korsakov made his allegation of Musorgsky's incompetence the justification for recomposing the music and publishing and producing his version of *Boris Godunov* in place of Musorgsky's; and those who objected to what Rimsky had done as a falsification of Musorgsky's work accepted the idea of his incompetence and made it the justification for producing falsifications of their own—the result being that we never heard Musorgsky's own work but only Rimsky's or Stokowski's or Horowitz's rewriting of that work. In 1952 it seemed as though this state of affairs had at last come to an end: the Metropolitan produced Musorgsky's own version of *Boris;* and since it had a great success with the public there was reason to expect it to be performed thereafter. However the expectation proved incorrect: this year the Metropolitan substituted Shostakovitch's version of *Boris.*

My comment on this version in the last issue was based on my own hearing of three excerpts that were broadcast in 1944, and on what Olin Downes, at that time, reported after an examination of the score.

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I heard now and then a garish woodwind color characteristic of Shostakovitch but not of Musorgsky and out of key with its musical context; Downes reported finding "stronger and harsher colors" than Musorgsky's and "powerful if crude effects" in a use of an orchestra like Rimsky-Korsakov's with an added piccolo clarinet and contrabassoon. And Shostakovitch, according to Downes, had not limited himself to changes in orchestration: he had put Varlaam's song in Rimsky's key of F minor instead of Musorgsky's key of F sharp minor; at one point in this song he had eliminated Musorgsky's "wild syncopation" in the accompaniment; at a point in Dimitri's account of his dream he had filled in the horns' descending octaves with harmonies. It appeared that Shostakovitch was still another of those who had felt free to change Musorgsky's work to suit their own tastes as no painter or poet would think of doing with the work of another.

Having now heard the entire Shostakovitch version at the Metropolitan I can report hearing, throughout the evening, orchestral colors and effects characteristic of Shostakovitch that were, at times strikingly and tastelessly, out of key with Musorgsky's music, and that constituted an impress on this music of Shostakovitch's crude and vulgar mind. They represented, also, still another instance of the failure to understand that Musorgsky's orchestration—like Mozart's, Berlioz's, Debussy's or Stravinsky's—was integral with the substance of his music and one of the elements that gave it its expressive character. This was understood by Karol Rathaus, who, when he edited the original Musorgsky score for the Metropolitan's 1952 production, decided that "it is clear that Musorgsky, in writing for the orchestra, had definite tonal vision—*'Klangvorstellung',*" and who, in his editing, scrupulously used Musorgsky's own orchestra to realize Musorgsky's own *Klangvorstellung* more effectively. And it was understood by Fritz Stiedry and Max Rudolf, on whose advice Mr. Bing produced the Musorgsky original in 1952. But it was not understood by Rimsky-Korsakov, who, in addition to changing melody, harmony and rhythm, imposed on the somber work the brilliant orchestral colors of his own music; it was not understood by Shostakovitch; it is not understood by Erich Leinsdorf, on whose advice Mr. Bing produced the Shostakovitch revision this year; and it is not understood by the critics who approved of what this version sounded like and of the Metropolitan's adoption of it. Professor Lang will denounce the performance of a seventeenth-century piece in anything but its original instrumental form; but he was, he wrote in a Sunday article, "not among those who bewail Rimsky's work; it was an excellent job," "Shostakovitch was more successful than his predecessor," and "the Metropolitan did the right thing in accepting Erich Leinsdorf's recommendation to change to the Shostakovitch version"—this even though Lang had reported in his first review that Shostakovitch, like Rimsky, had not merely reorchestrated *Boris* but had "reached into the innards of the

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score, often changing even the crucial and very personal element of part writing."

Leinsdorf's advice went beyond the adoption of Shostakovitch's revision. As first completed in 1869 the opera ended with Boris's death; in 1872 Musorgsky added a new final scene, the one in the forest of Kromy, so that the end of the work, like the beginning, was concerned with the Russian people; but in the Metropolitan's production this year the final Kromy scene was placed before the scene of Boris's death. Also, Musorgsky's prologue and four acts were compressed into three acts. And in the garden scene as Musorgsky wrote it Dimitri encounters Rangoni, obeys his order to hide during the Polonaise, and reappears for the duet with Marina that ends the scene; but at the Metropolitan this year the scene began with the duet, which was followed by Rangoni's order to Dimitri to hide, and ended with the Polonaise, in which Dimitri reappeared dancing with Marina.

As for the performance I attended, Leinsdorf paced and shaped the work effectively but did not at all times succeed in keeping principals and chorus in gear with the orchestra. There was excellent singing by Gedda as Dimitri, Tozzi as Pimen and Franke as the simpleton; but Siepi sang Boris with a voice that was rough and hoarse in full volume, Brenda Lewis sang Marina with the shreds of her once beautiful voice, and Corena was a vocally and physically inadequate Varlaam. The English words of John Gutman's translation that I heard now and then, some of them pronounced with foreign accents, I would have preferred not to hear; and Boris's death would have been better without the distracting stage business of Shuisky ascending the steps of the throne and turning to look threateningly at the terrified Tsarevitch. If it is a historical fact that Shuisky seized the throne, it is one that Musorgsky doesn't include in his opera and that it is not for a stage director to introduce.

On the other hand Donizetti's engagingly melodious *L'Elisir d'Amore* lends itself to the amusing interpolations of the Metropolitan's new production: the bits of business—e.g. the old woman drinking a little of Dr. Dulcamara's elixir and throwing away her crutch and beginning to dance—contrived by Nathaniel Merrill in his staging of the work; Dulcamara's spectacular arrival and departure in a balloon provided by Robert O'Hearn with his scenery and costumes; the burlesque soldiers' march devised by Todd Bolender in addition to the dances that accompanied a few of the ensembles. With good acting by the principals, this was an unusually effective dramatic performance; but their singing made it less than a brilliant musical one. Elisabeth Soederstroem used her bright, clear and steady soprano voice well; but Dino Formichini's tenor, agreeable in moderate volume in its lower range, strained and tightened in loud high notes and wrecked the lovely *"Una furtiva lagrima"* with a couple of bursts of bawling; Guarrera's baritone had a strong wobble at times; and Co-

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rena's explosive half-parlando buffo style concealed the threadbare condition of his bass. Fausto Cleva conducted well.

Gluck's *Alceste,* which the Metropolitan revived in 1951-52 for Flagstad, was given a new production this year—again in the English translation of John Gutman—for the first appearances with the company of Eileen Farrell. Mr. Bing had delayed until Farrell's voice no longer had the splendor in her highest notes that it used to have; but the continuing splendor of the voice below those notes made her singing of the beautiful music ear-ravishing; and with the superb singing of Gedda and the work of the lesser soloists, the ever present chorus and the orchestra, the musical performance conducted by Leinsdorf was very fine. But Michael Manuel's stage production was less satisfying. His scenery, most of it suitable, included four huge statues that did nothing but disturb the eye with their presence; his robes for the men of the chorus made them look absurd; his costumes for the dancers in the concluding ballet were as bad; and he was no more successful than Herbert Graf nine years earlier in dealing with the difficulty this opera presents with its long stretches of music without action. Like Dr. Graf, Mr. Manuel was not content to make the chorus expressively active, in ways that were sometimes unfortunate, but had its singing accompanied by interpretive plastic movement of dancers—presumably devised by Antony Tudor—that looked like the goings-on in a modern-dance class at a girl's college. And Tudor's two ballets were quite awful.

After the luxuriantly soft style of the Royal Ballet it was exciting to see again the sharp clarity of the New York City Ballet; and after the disappointing new choreographies of the Royal Ballet's Frederic Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan and John Cranko, not only was it exciting to see the New York City Ballet's new works of Balanchine, but there was pleasure from the contributions of Todd Bolender, Francisco Moncion and John Taras to the work called *Jazz Concert.* This comprised settings of four pieces of music by European composers concerned with American ragtime and jazz: Stravinsky's *Ragtime* (not the 1919 *Piano-Rag Music* but the 1918 piece for a small instrumental group), which was set by Balanchine; Milhaud's *La Création du Monde* (1923), set by Bolender; Poulenc's *Les Biches* (1923), set by Moncion; and Stravinsky's *Ebony Concerto* for Woody Herman's Orchestra (1945), set by Taras. Milhaud incorporates facsimiles of what he heard into what might be called *Impressions of American Popular Music;* and Bolender used this as the serviceable soundtrack for a work in which a brief prologue concerned with male and female from Adam and Eve down through the ages led to an account of the rise and fall of a girl named Peaches in the period that ended with the 1929 stock market crash. This account, with its strokes of comedy and brilliant sequences of Broadway musical-show dancing of the period, testified

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to the talents of Bolender that would be profitably employed in a Broadway musical show; it also provided the occasion for the classically trained dancers of the company to reveal an engaging proficiency in musical-show dancing; and there were additional pleasures from Janet Reed's comic gift in the role of Peaches, Arthur Mitchell's sinuous strutting in the role of her Negro tempter, and Edward Villella's leaps and spins in the role of her humble admirer.

Poulenc's score is mostly straight Poulenc—which is to say pleasantly inconsequential; and Moncion operated with more engaging results in the lyrical Adagietto for Sara Leland and Andantino for Leland and Anthony Blum, than in his kidding of the social behavior and dances of the early twenties. Leland and Blum danced their pieces charmingly.

In sharp contrast with the bland Milhaud and Poulenc scores are the two in which Stravinsky subjects the ragtime and jazz idioms to manipulation by his powerful mind. With the more elaborate *Ebony Concerto* Taras used a Balanchinesque vocabulary skilfully and effectively—the effect being most striking in the opening Allegro moderato, in which the movements of the group headed by Patricia McBride and Arthur Mitchell on the dark stage were seen in silhouette against a lighted backdrop. And for the sourly parodistic *Ragtime* Balanchine used only two dancers in his play with the style of Negro jazz dancing. The sharply outlined and articulated movements for Diana Adams were (like the movements of the climactic pas de deux in *Agon*) something special in which she achieved the clarity of definition and the superlative in performance that she does not, for me, achieve in her roles in *Swan Lake, The Nutcracker* and *Apollo.* As such they were also further evidence of Balanchine's eye for a dancer's capabilities—the eye that led him to pick for Adams' partner a boy from the corps, Bill Carter, whose easy, stylish movements complemented hers delightfully.

The series in *Jazz Concert* was continued in *Modern Jazz: Variants,* Balanchine's setting of a commissioned work by Gunther Schuller in which material in an atonal idiom of serious music was the context for material in the style of modern jazz. Schuller's atonal serious idiom was not a medium of expressive communication for me; and I was left cold by his modern-jazz-style writing for the orchestra and in the solos for the piano, bass, vibraharp and drums of the Modern Jazz Quartet. But for Balanchine the work provided the sufficient sound-track for a series of superb pieces in which he combined movements of ballet and movements derived from Negro jazz dancing—intricate acrobatic and erotic duos for Diana Adams and John Jones and for Melissa Hayden and Arthur Mitchell; a solo for Jones, with background movements of a group of girls, that worked up from a slow, sinuous beginning to larger, more animated movements and subsided into a slow, sinuous conclusion; a leisurely solo for Adams, with background movements of a line of boys, in which she did more of what she had done so effectively in *Ragtime;* a solo for Hayden whose faster acrobatic intricacies also

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were something special in which she achieved the superlative in performance that she does not, for me, achieve in *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker.*

Another new work of Balanchine, *Variations from Don Sebastian,* to some of Donizetti's simpler-minded music, was an elaborate and joyous virtuoso showpiece in which the solos and duos of the two principals, with their new intricacies and jokes, were interspersed among dances by the supporting group. The spectacular feats calling for enormous technique and strength were the kind of thing Hayden does brilliantly; but in a later performance Violette Verdy gave them an additional transfiguring elegance and distinction; and in this performance Villella imparted his ease and fluidity to the leaps and spins that Jonathan Watts had executed with evident effort.

Unspectacular and quiet, on the other hand, were the movements Balanchine contrived to go with *Monumentum pro Gesualdo,* Stravinsky's beautifully wrought recomposition for orchestra of three of Gesualdo's madrigals. The piece called for nothing more than the clean execution it received from Adams, Conrad Ludlow and the supporting group.

And the remaining new work was Balanchine's setting of Brahms's *Liebesliederwalzer* Opp. 52 and 65 for vocal quartet and piano four hands—music which one wouldn't expect Balanchine to be interested in, but which elicited from him one of his loveliest creations. The rising curtain revealed a candle-lit ballroom with four pairs of dancers in mid-nineteenth-century ball costume in the center and the musicians in similar costume at the left; and with the start of Op. 54 the dancers began a series of waltzes that enchanted one with their varied visual design, their romantic expressive character, and such striking details as Verdy and Nicholas Magallanes dancing with their faces concealed from each other by their hands. This series ended with the dancers leaving the stage through the French windows at the back and the curtain falling; and after an interval the curtain rose again to reveal—on a stage now lighted by a large chandelier—the girls in long tutus and toe-shoes for a series of waltzes made ethereal and brilliant by the extensions, the lifts, the spins of ballet. At the end of this series, when the last pair of dancers had left the stage, the musicians continued with the final slow waltz of Op. 65 as the ballroom resumed its original candle-lit appearance and the dancers—the girls in their original ball dresses—returned slowly to listen and, at the end of the piece, to applaud the musicians as the curtain fell. David Hays provided the handsome decor, Karinska the beautiful costumes; the music was performed well by the singers, Angelene Rasmussen, Mitzi Wilson, Frank Porretta and Herbert Beattie, and the pianists, Louise Sherman and Robert Irving. Adams (with Carter again), Hayden (with Watts), Jillana (with Ludlow) and Verdy (with Magallanes) all danced superbly; but Verdy's sharp clarity and accuracy, her way of completing the con-

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figuration of body with delicate movement of hand or toe, and the general elegance and distinction I mentioned earlier, made her performance stand out among the others; and a solo around Adams gave Carter another opportunity to exhibit a large easy grace.

The season lost by the temporary absence of the exquisite Allegra Kent; it gained by Verdy's appearances in new roles—her lovely Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker,* her distinguished second movement of *Symphony in C,* and, just before the end of the season, her long-delayed Odette in *Swan Lake,* which—in the context of a freshly rehearsed performance of the work—overwhelmed one with the quietly vivid beauty and distinction of what was familiar and what was newly devised by Balanchine for her personal style. On the same occasion the *Pas de Deux* of last spring had Hayden dancing very beautifully in her own way the part created for Verdy, and Jacques d'Amboise giving, with his brilliance and grandness, new dimensions to the part done originally by Ludlow. (D'Amboise, I might add, produced similar great moments in *Apollo,* but still looked overawed by the role at other moments; and there was still need of what costume, make-up and wig could do to conceal—in the portrayer of a Greek god—the appearance of a clean-cut lad from Dedham, Massachusetts.) As for repertory, there was loss in the canceling of *Episodes* and *Divertimento No. 15* for lack of rehearsal time, the omitting of *Four Temperaments* and *Concerto Barocco* presumably to make room for the new works: it would have been preferable to omit *Medea,* and *Souvenirs* in its present heavily italicized state. But what was offered was mostly a great repertory beautifully performed.

Notes on Contributors *(cont.)*

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W. D. SNODGRASS

Gottfried Benn: The Dissolution of Matter

READING GOTTFRIED BENN[1] FOR THE FIRST TIME, I am startled to find myself interested not in his poetry, but in his prose—and interested not because of its success, but because of the meaning of its failures. Insofar as I can understand German poetry, which isn't far, Benn's poetry seems successful but not very interesting; not as good, say, as Eliot; perhaps as good as Pound. Yet it loses so much in translation—especially since much of it depends heavily on formal factors, brilliant rhyming, and other untranslatable qualities. The translators work hard, losing sometimes the literary brilliance, sometimes the meaning, seldom capturing both. By supplementing the English versions with a German dictionary, I can reach something of the original, but the sweep and jolt is lost.

The prose is another matter. Nearly all these essays are, in some sense, autobiographical; they all attack, philosophically, anthropologically, literarily, or politically the problems of meaninglessness and vacancy which permeated his thought—because they dogged and determined his life.

There was a curious emptiness and degradation to his career. Born in 1886, he grew up near Berlin, studied divinity (to please his father, a minister), then took a degree in medicine and entered the Army. The rest of his life revolves about these two centers—Berlin and the Army. His early poetry concerns the physical decay he saw as a young physician; his early prose, a corresponding intellectual and psychological decomposition. As an Army doctor in 1914, he was stationed in an Army jail and in a Belgian whore house. He wrote of these degradations, and (in a play, *Home Front*), of the moral and mental decadence of the German occupiers of Belgium.

In 1922 his wife died; his daughter passed on to foster parents. Meantime, in the words of Ashton:

> Consciously or unconsciously, he spent the 1920's in a retreat from substance . . . he withdrew to form: from the bald, unrhymed ametrical language of his juvenile shockers to a glittering tide of poems in

[1] PRIMAL VISION: SELECTED WRITINGS OF GOTTFRIED BENN, edited by *E. B. Ashton*. New Directions. $4.75.

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> trochaic rhythms and short, flawlessly rhymed lines. . . . He fell back on tradition, on a deceptively deft employment of technological and scientific neologisms to conceal strict, classicist orthodoxy.

Professionally, he became a specialist in skin and venereal diseases.

When the Nazis came to power, he was one of the few important intellectuals to stay in Berlin, first supporting the Third Reich, then turning to attack it violently in more or less secret essays and poems. Yet, despite his detestation of the regime, he re-entered the Army where, among other duties, he analyzed Wehrmacht suicides. After the fall of the Reich, Benn stayed at his medical duties in Berlin, in the path of the Russian Armies, even though he had been openly anti-Communist; his second wife went into the Western Zone. When he sent a maid for her, however, the maid was picked up by Russian troops and kept for some months; Benn later found that his wife's village had passed into Russian occupation and that she, after imaginable abuses, had committed suicide.

Cleared of charges as a Nazi, Benn slowly re-established his life in Berlin, remarried, and began publishing once more. Then something surprising happened. He became a popular figure in his old age; though always controversial, he became, in the few years before his death in 1956, the grand old man of German letters. Even then, he wrote (as Ashton records in his Introduction):

> Yes, in literature I have won through, and cabinet members and the Federal President and the Lord Mayor send me birthday greetings, but getting old means that everything one has done seems dubious in retrospect. . . .

The problem which (in one disguise or another) constantly dogged Benn's life and thought, which gives him a crucial place in our intellectual history, was a deep distrust of substance, an open disbelief in the reality of matter. His failure to solve the problem makes him, today, a hero to the German public.

Benn was born just at the time when matter (or, sometimes, metaphorically, "substance") was being broken down into energy: first by the painters, like Manet, Van Gogh, Matisse; by the poets, like Rimbaud (whose objects are not only surcharged with energy, but in the process, lose their identity as objects); by the musicians like Debussy (who dissolves the solid matter of form and tonality into a vague and luminous energy not unlike that of Monet), and by the more savagely energetic atonalists. At the same time, all the forms, the matter, of 19th century social life were on the one hand being rigidified by the vested interests and hired liars (historians, preachers, cheer-leaders and ad-men), and on the other hand being broken down by enlightened criticism. It would not be long until the solid mask of personality (the most carefully guarded vested interest of all) would collapse as depth

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psychology would probe into the sources of energy beneath. Finally, the metaphor would be taken literally: matter itself would be converted into energy, the atom would split.

It is his relation to this dissolution of matter which makes Benn's work so interesting. For the fact is that he never believed in the reality of matter, the solidity of substance. Never did a sense of unreality leave him. As early as 1934, he wrote:

> In war and peace, at the front and behind it, as an officer and as a doctor, among generals and profiteers, before rubber and jail cells, over beds and coffins, in triumph and decay, I never lost the trance-like feeling that this reality did not exist. A kind of inner concentration began, a stirring of secret spheres; and individuality faded, and a primal stratum emerged, intoxicated, image-laden, Panic.

As late as 1949, a character in his *Dialogue: Three Old Men,* looks back over his life, the social injustice and greed he has catered to, and can only say:

> Then I played White Man, beating the cotton-niggers over the head with a hickory cane so that the dust flew. But I had to; my employers in the civilized countries wanted their yachts modernized and their grooms assured of a higher standard of living. Then into the rice paddies, into the indigo fields, to the markets: I bought many a good set of hands—if they balked, they got the cat-o'-nine tails across their backs and pepper tea on the welts later. A queen in one civilized country got an orchid bouquet that flowered for six weeks under special Brazilian care; I had a part in this, though on the lowest level, where the panthers and rattlesnakes strike.
>
> All realities—but what did they affect? The bones, the muscles, including dyspnoea and spirochaete. Where have they all gone, what did they leave behind? Looking back now, all of it seems incredible, wholly imaginary; we are an ego but we perforate it hourly; . . .

This distrust of external reality is intimately interwoven with a distrust of Nature, a preference for the city and the artificial:

> Estrangement from nature. Nature is a strange milieu; if you leave your room, even the ordinary air feels alien. . . . We are creatures of giant cities; it is in the city, and there only, that the Muses exult and grieve.

The artificial, however, may mean the conceptual:

> The materialization of rays and the dematerialization of matter by means of rays. Nature turns into a network of concepts and symbols, and these in turn produce matter and Nature. The unification of matter and energy is completed, as is the unification of thought and

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> motile Nature. Once, to be sure, God was the Creator of worlds, . . . but for some time now it has been brains that keep the earth going.

And, to show that this relationship between denial of Nature and the dissolution of matter is no accident:

> The material bases of our existence are of recent date. Chesterfield came on the market only between the two world wars, made by Liggett and Myers; the first blended cigarette appeared in 1913 in the shape of the Camel—the Duke Trust. It was the same year in which Bohr's sensational new atomic theory was published.

The same feeling may be expressed by what Benn, somewhat inconsistently, calls "nihilism":

> This is the law: Nothing is, if anything ever was; nothing will be. . . . There is nothing that can be turned into reality.

This last statement, though, is subject to an ambiguity: art, as we shall see later, can and does turn this nothing into a something, into a reality:

> . . . all the great minds among the white nations have felt only one inner task, namely the creative camouflaging of their nihilism. . . . not for an instant are they unaware of the essential nature of their own inner creative substance. It is the abyss, the void, the unsolvable, the cold, the inhuman element.

At other times, Benn will express this emptiness as the imminent collapse of the White races:

> The white peoples are on the way out, no matter whether or not the theories about their doom are now accepted. Decomposition is palpable, a return to earlier conditions impossible, the substance spent; . . . The new power is there, holding the cigarette-lighter to the fuse.

Or, again, more personally:

> . . . it was the vision of the light-skinned race whose tragedy I bore within myself, whose abysses I had sensed, . . .

For what he sees here is not so much the collapse of the White race, as the collapse (and he hopes the transformation) of the white vision of the ego, the self. And it is *this* emptiness which, in one form or another, he continually laments. From the beginning of his career:

> sometimes, for an hour, you are; the rest is what happens. Sometimes the two tides swell into a dream. Sometimes a rustling: when you are broken.

And from the end:

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> I regard prayer and humility as arrogant and pretentious. Their premise is that I am anything at all—which is just what I doubt; there is only something that goes through me.

He tried once, Benn tells us, to find the ego, search out its secrets:

> I saw the ego, the look in its eyes. I dilated its pupil, looked far into it, looked far out of it; the gaze from such eyes is almost expressionless, more like scenting . . . an age-old danger. From disasters that were latent, disasters that antedated the word, come dreadful memories of the race, hybrid, beast-shaped, sphinx-pouched features of the primal face. I recalled the dicta of certain profoundly experienced men, that evil would come of their telling all they knew. I thought of the strange adages, that one should give up searching for the ultimate words that need only be spoken to unhinge heaven and earth.

Benn might also have recalled that, although Tiresias warned that his knowledge was dangerous and painful, his knowledge was nonetheless true and did establish an identity. It did not prove that Oedipus did not exist, or that the world could be so easily destroyed or obliterated. *That* is wishful thinking. It only proved that Oedipus and his world were not what he wanted to believe them; that he had been wilfully blind to his own situation.

So he stopped searching: in the place of vacuum, he proposed (as did many artists of his generation) to erect art. Again and again, he declared that art is the only thing that will create form, the only real reality:

> I know a sphere without . . . mobility, a sphere that rests, that can never be set aside, that is conclusive: the esthetic sphere.

Finally, art is not only to replace substance in the world, but negation (the rejection of substance) becomes a way of reaching art:

> negation alone will help to create that new world which not only man but Nature herself inclines to, in which she senses her transformation: the world of expression.

That, of course, is somewhat shaky reasoning: there is no matter unless we create art; also, we must reject matter to create art. Benn's thought on such matters has much, also, of the god-creator sort of *hubris* so common in such esthetic theories. The more one thinks about it, the more it seems to have something of infantile megalomania about it—what Bergler describes as the baby's refusal to accept any world outside his own creation and dominion.

Yet inside this world of creation, Benn did excel and created much. And for one who refused to recognize it, he certainly crammed his essays full of external reality. One strikes on passage after passage of most brilliantly captured physical detail:

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> In a city where there is nothing but strip-tease and nudity, where crimes become plausible and prison cells become scarce, the mind develops needs different from those in countries where the Shah sips nectarine-syrup in a red velvet chair among the sage bushes in his garden, or where Sir Something-or-other raises his dress-shirted arms behind his head to fasten the clasps on the blue and scarlet ribbon of the C.M.G., or on the beach of some scabious-colored sea, where the green parasols unfold and glamor girls, unclad save for a G-string, gaze through jeweled sunglasses at the water-skiers flashing behind the yachts—there the twittering of the wearers of purple and here the groaning of the damned.

I have quoted very fully, here and elsewhere, trying to give something of Benn's flavor; yet this remains inadequate. To know him at his best one must read such longer passages as the beginning of "Art and the Third Reich" where for some five or six pages, Benn summons up phalanx upon phalanx of detail, crisp, shining, hard as porcelain, to recreate the world of upper-class 19th century society.

Still, it is only too clear that art did not fill the gap: however much he may have surveyed his creations and found them good, Benn still felt like "a naked vacuum of fact." And into this vacuum rushed—the State. Hence Benn's first great attraction to the Nazis. Like Goebbels, he had defeated all systems, shown the phoniness of all the histories, the platforms, the organizations, until he could bear the detachment of his brilliant intellect no longer. Benn at least saw the foolishness of the Nazis very quickly—he could not long silence his critical intellect as did Goebbels. Perhaps the saddest thing is that Benn, himself, knew precisely why he joined with the Third Reich:

> the vast existential emptiness of today's German man, stripped of whatever fills the inner space in other countries . . . here was nothing but a vacuum of historic twaddle, crushed education, bumptious political forgeries by the regime, and cheap sports. But to wear an eye-catching uniform, to get reports, bend over maps. . . . all this creates a space-filling impression of individual expansion and supra-personal effect, in short, the complex which the average man requires.

Or, in the briefest possible terms:

> Man's increasing diminution is the very force that makes him think of breeding a stronger race.

At first, Benn had accepted the Nazis' promise of a transformation:

> Will you not finally realize . . . that the events in Germany are not political tricks . . . but are the emergence of a new biological type, a mutation of history and a people's wish to breed itself?

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Yet, even after he had seen the folly of the regime, he never lost his belief in some sort of transformation, a belief that some day someone would step in and say the magical words which would change everything. Even in 1949, he is still writing:

> There are new elements in existence and the West would like to take a bold new plunge. For me there is no doubt that a cerebral mutation is going on, held down by all that is called public, guided by the state-controlled extermination of all entity.

Again:

> My nihilism is universal, it carries—it knows of the unfathomable transformation.

And to the very end he continues to identify that transformation with something to be found in the racial and public consciousness.

Like most of the poets of his generation—Pound, Eliot—Benn shows that longing for the past, for myths, the church, the State, for some external authority. As soon as he found it, he rebelled against it. Yet he did not really rebel; rather he stayed in Berlin, in the Army, and complained. He never escaped this sort of conflict; could never give in to one side or the other. He could not yield his judgment and join a movement (like the frustrated True Believer of Hofer's book); neither could he stand by himself and be an individual—line up his actions with his beliefs and live his own life. Be an exile if necessary.

There is a wonderful passage in "The Ptolemean" where he speaks of his reasons, late in life, for remaining once more in Berlin—not going into the countryside which he saw as freedom:

> here I had laid the foundations of my life, here I meant to determine its end with the precise stipulation that half my ashes were to be scattered on the September wind and the other half to be preserved in an empty Nescafé tin!

How well that sums it up.

This conflict led, as Benn knew only too well, to an abrupt split in his life—a complete dichotomy between act and belief. One must agree with Ashton that such a passage as this, from *A Double Life,* does most to identify him with the common man:

> "Realize the position"—i.e., adjust to the position, camouflage yourself, avoid convictions ("with a customer you keep your private views to yourself . . .")—but on the other hand, go right along with convictions, ideologies, syntheses in every direction of the compass, if institutions or agencies require it.

Ashton comments:

> A great public need was filled by this canon that ennables men to

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> live with themselves while surviving in our time. The premise of a senseless and intrinsically evil historic world obviated the passage of moral judgement upon one's superiors.

Well, yes and no. Undoubtedly the public welcomed such a position—after getting over its first shock. (Nothing is so shocking as to hear someone propose that we should do just what we are doing—Cf. *A Modest Proposal.*) But it was just such an attitude on the part of the German public, and its intellectuals in particular, which made Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz possible; which leads one to ask seriously what is meant by "a great public need."

Again, one wants to ask just what is meant by "one's superiors." Only a very strange system of values (which neither Benn nor Ashton would likely affirm) would rate Eichmann or Himmler higher than Gottfried Benn—or above the man in the German street.

This split between act and thought helped permit the very worst elements of the German public to come into a "superior" position. The refusal to judge "one's superiors" permitted them to do as they pleased once in power. And this is precisely what the common man does and wants to do, for he cannot bear to act by what he knows his judgement of "his superiors" would be. He knows that tobacco will likely give him lung cancer, but if you ask him about it, he will think you subversive—he dare not admit his distrust of his life's authorities. He knows, really, why the wars are fought (talk, just once, with a soldier overseas), but he dare not live by the authority of his own mind and senses.

I do not deny that such a split between act and thought is sometimes necessary. Concentration camp inmates, themselves, often could survive only by establishing such an economy of emotions—something approaching a schizophrenia. But very few of us spend much of our lives in such drastic circumstances. It is special pleading to pretend that such choices are forced upon us often.

We can scarcely blame the man who does what he must simply to survive. Still, we may admire the man who finally sees some values beyond his mere physical existence (faced with the alternative of turning your family in to the state, you may decide that your spiritual existence is of greater importance). We certainly do not admire the man who exaggerates the gravity of his own situation so as to excuse himself from making an unpleasant choice, the man who pretends that he spends his life facing concentration camp alternatives.

And this is precisely what Benn does. Like our own Beats, he exaggerates the terms of choice:

> the coming century will . . . permit no more than two types, . . . criminals and monks—and I plead for the black cowls.

Or again, with more special pleading:

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> to want to unify action and thought—what a backwoodsy notion! Imagine a modern physicist trying to express his calculations, his professional work, in his life, to harmonize them with his life, to "realize" them—or Bachofen, his matriarchal theories; or Böcklin, his "Isle of the Dead"—how comical! If chance, the events of his time, compel a man to live in the historic world, among sharpshooters and profiteers, trappers and rabbit thieves, should that cause him to step out of himself and forcefully to voice opinions?

It should scarcely be necessary to name the first rate scientists, theoreticians, or artists, who have tried to harmonize their professional work with their daily morality; we have not found them comical. Again, it is scarcely chance that placed Gottfried Benn in Berlin; he chose to stay and serve a group of men he recognized as idiots and monsters. Now, however, he pretends that there was no choice, to excuse himself for not choosing what would have been difficult. For like the Beats, what he wants is, over and over, to put himself at the mercy of those very authorities he abominates; to return again and again to Berlin, or to the Army.

Thus, in his "defense of error" what he defends is not his own actions, his refusal to emigrate, or even his right to error, but his passivity. He merely recognizes that he would do the same again. For, in his wishful thinking, he simply will not credit the outside world; he will flee again and again to the city of his childhood or to those parental institutions against whose nylon fur he can burrow in and dream an existence for himself:

> Nothing dreamier than barracks! . . . It is late August; the swallows still fly, but already are massed for the great passage. A battalion band rehearses in a corner, the sun sparkling on trumpets and percussives as they play "Die Himmel rühmen" and "Ich schiess den Hirsch im wilden Forst." It is the fifth year of war, and here is a completely secluded world, a kind of béguinage. The shouts of command are external; inwardly all things are muffled and still.
>
> Around the drill shed the garrison blocks: dreams. Not the dreams of fame and victories, but dreams of loneliness, of transience, of shadows. Reality is far removed.

So, with their eyes tight shut, the armies raged through our world. In similar barracks, there and elsewhere, others found it, and will find it, not so dreamy.

> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

Small wonder Benn has become popular. And with readymade dreams so available (here's the paper, there's the television), why should any of us bother with thought at all? At least not until the soldiers are crunching on the porch.

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C. ROLAND WAGNER

In Sickness and in Health

THE FRENZY OF CULTURAL SELF-CRITICISM which we have been subjected to during the last dozen years has finally issued in a stirring book.[1] Paul Goodman is not only free of the self-hatred of the middlebrow critics who cling to the Organization, but free also of the erratic self-adoration of alienated critics (both radical and conservative) who reject the central achievements of the Western world. Most significantly, he is free of the confusion, the failure of will sometimes, of those intellectuals whose highest ideal is to maintain "tension" and "dialectic" within the soul of man and between the individual soul and society. For it is precisely the *ideal* that Goodman reasserts in an area that has not been alive with ideal thoughts for a long time.

How exciting to pick up the newspaper or the news magazine after reading *Growing Up Absurd* and to see the old words and the old world in new depth! The other day I read about the criminal conviction of the executives of the big electric supply companies for violating the antitrust laws. The story was that the executives met secretly in a hotel room under assumed names and used a special code to work out an agreement on prices and bids. Here was Goodman's Rat Race on the highest level: let the platitudes of American business be mouthed by the Goldwaters and the Eisenhowers and then get on with the realistic "cooperative" work of eliminating all risk and initiative. A stimulating model for students at the Harvard Business School! But why did these hardheaded business leaders allow themselves to get caught? I thought of Goodman's juvenile delinquents desperately "raising the ante" to prove their manliness, and unconsciously wishing to be caught and punished and accepted by society. Perhaps these executives have weaker egos and stronger superegos than we thought; perhaps they too hated the compulsive lives they lead and fatalistically exposed themselves in order to rest quietly under the protection of friendly (but firm) jailors. The only important *moral* difference between the Organization Man and the juvenile delinquent, Goodman declares, is that the latter *believes* in the American way of life, the former does not.

Goodman is unusually capable of penetrating quickly to the human reality behind the economic and political facts. Organizational rhetoric gets translated into living language. "Waste of manpower," for example, means human energy that is wasted in perpetuating a self-defeating social system. Creative energy *within* the individual is blocked by social sickness as well as by personal sickness, and one helps to intensify the other. Thus Goodman is dismayed at the wholly

[1] GROWING UP ABSURD, by *Paul Goodman*. Random House. $4.50.

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external approach which Dr. Conant has taken to our educational problems. Dr. Conant's primary concern is to get more of the "academically talented" (the top 15% in high school) to take science and mathematics, but he ignores the question of why it is so difficult to get people to take "hard" courses and why there are so few "academically talented." "For the big causes of stupidity," Goodman writes, "of lack of initiative and lack of honorable incentive, are glaring; yet they [our public officials] do not intend to notice or remedy these big causes. . . . Our society cannot have it both ways: to maintain a conformist and ignoble system *and* to have skillful and spirited men to man that system with."

Goodman is able to say these things because he possesses an ideal conception of human nature fulfilling itself in a real American world. He cares for what is, because he conceives of what might be. He imaginatively sees young people doing useful work, resisting mere adjustment and belongingness, getting a decent education, loving without fear or guilt, becoming adequate parents, and finding positive goals in a vital society. In the light of the ideal, he looks at *all* the young victims of the Rat Race: not only the "academically talented," but the talented and the untalented, and not only them but the talents within them about which they know nothing. He cares for them all: the delinquents who *want* to belong but are forced to remain outside the Organization and create their own pathetic alternatives; the Beats who *don't* want to belong but in effect reproduce the conformity of the organized structure because they lack the power of true autonomy; the Organization Men (including the workers and managers) who want and yet don't want to remain in the system, but can't really envisage anything else.

Thus prophetically does Goodman hold up his ideal of normality and human orthodoxy before the failures of American life; thus prophetically is he touched with a grace of concrete insight. But is his ideal *in fact* normal and orthodox? Has he grasped the true nature of man in society? Only in part, I think. Like the superficial social scientists he condemns, he is inclined to give the passing social scene too important a place in explaining the nature and purpose of human life. Not, of course, that he assumes that any particular social system is a genuine expression of healthy human nature. It is rather that he gives too much weight to *some* social situation, ideal though it may be, for establishing mental health. Despite his psychoanalytic orientation, Goodman is finally not as close to Freud as he is to the eighteenth century and early Romantic view of man as basically good but corrupted by bad institutions. Consequently, his vision of human nature not only profoundly *assists* him in his concrete insights: it at the same time often *interferes* with the truth of those insights.

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When Goodman speaks somberly of the gradual loss of *useful work* in our society, there are two questions that need to be asked: How does one judge what is really "useful" and how much influence does useful work have upon happiness and mental stability? Obviously the overabundance of our productive capacity has increased the need to create artificial inducements to buy. Packaging and public relations have become more important than actual production. The worker is less humanly involved in the product than formerly. All this is true. But it does not provide us with an adequate definition of useful work. Clearly the idea of what is useful varies considerably from culture to culture and within a culture. In the middle ages, for example, the work of the aristocrats and farmers was called "useful," that of the tradesmen "useless." Certainly the aristocrats were more essential to the medieval economy than the tradesmen; but maybe the medieval class distinctions and values "worked" without being sufficiently grounded in what is truly "natural"? And then there were the Nazis: they must have thought of themselves, and perhaps their society thought of them, as highly useful citizens. But sick societies produce sick ideas of usefulness. Is there some objective norm of usefulness? Perhaps. But Goodman does not attempt to find it. His appeal to common sense on the question is persuasive only when we are thinking of the extreme examples: grown men sitting in "conference" to determine the appropriate jingle for selling bouillon cubes, or human beings on television acting like clowns in their shameless appeal to the most infantile level of an adult audience. Yet even here it may not be the work that is useless but the silly way it is being interpreted.

But Goodman carries the argument further. The lack of useful or meaningful work, he thinks, encourages abdication of responsibility, a loss of dignity and manliness, and a cynical or hip belief that "nothing really matters anyway." Now undoubtedly it is true that empty work will not serve to fill a substantially empty life—it may even empty it still further. It is also true that life cannot be full without meaningful work—leaving aside the problem of defining "meaningful." But it does not follow, and it is highly unlikely, that meaningful work will do much to fill an already empty life or that meaningless work will make a full life empty. Anyway, Goodman makes no attempt to prove his point. About the only evidence he offers is that the "best mental health used to be found among locomotive engineers, and is now found among air-line pilots! The task is useful, exacting, it sets in motion a big machine, and when it is over, it is done with." Apart from the difficulty of trying to determine exactly *what* is useful about transporting a plane-load of people from one position on the earth's surface to another—suppose a gang of advertising men are making the trip?—isn't it obvious that it is not the job but the kind of person who takes the job that makes for health? The job

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itself probably helps to *increase* the stability and maturity that already exist in the pilot, but is hardly the chief factor in creating it.[2]

Goodman's attack on *adjustment* and *belongingness* can be similarly questioned. It is, of course, profoundly true that to adjust to a neurotic society ought not to be the final ideal of the maturing youngster. Goodman is justified, I think, in challenging the strength of character of the Organization boys he quotes as saying: "My highest aim in life is to achieve a normal healthy marriage and raise healthy children." For what does the Organizational trainee mean by "healthy" except painless adjustment to the social and psychological status quo? Contemporary psychological jargon is often employed as a defense against the very realities it refers to. The trainee must play it safe, for otherwise he might have to question too many of the comfortable social illusions that help him to maintain the even deeper illusions of personality. But does it follow that "adjustment" and "belongingness" are fundamentally sick ideas, even in a relatively sick society? Beneath the desire to play it safe, and obscurely suggested in the slick language of scientism itself, we find, I think, a recognition of the essential truths that are batted about so glibly. Beneath the half truth lies the truth, the deeper desire. The jargon expresses both a desire *and* a defense. The members of the organization want to adjust and belong, not only to fakery and illness, but also to fundamental human orthodoxy—they want to adjust to *reality*, to the reality of family life. They may not know the cost of realizing the deeper desire, but they do desire, they do press forward *towards* reality, and this keeps the American Organization on the side of sanity. I do not think this is true of all organizations in every society, but I do think it is true of ours.

Goodman disagrees. He blames the Organization itself for producing the Beats because the Organization has become untrue to fundamental human orthodoxy and to reality. It is the entire system that has failed, he believes, not merely occasional individuals within the system—not merely the particular families that have spawned the rebels. He goes so

[2] In their careful study of mental illness in the New Haven community, Redlich and Hollingshead (*Social Class and Mental Illness*, 1958) found that a definite association exists between mental illness and social class. Both the *type* and the *amount* of illness vary significantly with class position: (1) "The lower the class, the greater the proportion of patients in the population;" (2) the distribution of psychosis and neurosis among patients varies inversely with respect to class: the higher the class the smaller the proportion of psychotics to neurotics; (3) the lowest class is subject to psychosis far out of proportion to the rest of the population.

Although "work" was not examined as a separate problem, there is possibly some support here for Goodman's view that mental health is affected by the kind of meaningless work that is offered to the lower classes, but there is no evidence to suggest that *within* a particular class the kind of work done has any significant effect on mental health. The final conclusions of the authors tend to reject Goodman's basic thesis: "While our data indicate that sociocultural factors are important in the prevalence of treated disorders in the population, we cannot conclude they are essential and necessary conditions in the etiology of mental disorders."

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far as to say that it is a sign of "robust mental health" on the part of the Beats that they reject "popular culture, Broadway theater, status commodities." (Again Goodman is evaluating mental health by the particular kind of thing that is done without regard for the kind of person who does it.) Goodman is thoroughly aware that the Beats are sick, but he prefers the sickness of his "crazy young allies" to the sickness of the Organization. At least the Beats show up the failures of the Organization even if they cannot (like true independents) break entirely from Organizational values. As Goodman analyzes it, they can neither affirm father's values because the old values have broken down, nor break entirely from father's values because there are none others "dominant" in our society to turn to. The question remains, however, whether there *can* be any alternative values. Alternative *social* values there certainly are, but how likely is it that there are any *psychological* alternatives? Goodman's analysis fails to distinguish father's social values from the more essential psychological value of just being father. How likely is it that there can be any other essential values for a normal boy than becoming a husband and father no matter *how* he does his work in sociey? The question answers itself. Consequently, when the Beats reject the central responsibilities of fatherhood (and Goodman agrees they are poor fathers), it is not primarily because of the failure of father's social values. It is rather more likely that they reject father as father first, and *therefore* the peripheral social situations that go with being that kind of father. Because they cannot identify sufficiently with father they become alienated from the social system. Those Beats whose rejection is not so fundamental, who are *realistically* rejecting the social situation and whose capacity for identity is strong, eventually leave the fold and become true independents (or return to the Organization and make their compromises). And a true independent is one who must accept the same orthodox family reality that the Organization man believes in. If some day the *majority* of Organization fathers are producing Beat sons who reject fatherhood, then we *will* be lost—but not until then.

Linked to Goodman's Utopian overemphasis on the social aspect of human nature, is an excessive optimism about what is practically possible for man. Again his devotion to the ideal has mixed results. Take the various implications he draws from the—in itself—magnificent moral battle cry of *Growing Up Absurd:* ". . . it is not the spirit of modern times that makes our society difficult for the young; it is that that spirit has not sufficiently realized itself." Everywhere Goodman see incomplete revolutions and everywhere dogmatic slumbers that we still need to be awakened from. The compromised "permissiveness" revolution is a case in point. Goodman is pleased at the new "dignity and spirit" of our young children raised in a softer environment than formerly. Unlike the new "realists" in child care, his special concern is not for more control but for *still more*

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freedom (together with positive goals). Permissiveness, he thinks, needs greater *political* support so that we can carry out *in fact* for the older children the theories we have been successfully practicing on the younger ones. (He calls this program a socialism of goals rather than a socialism of means.) But then Goodman goes much further: he suggests that there can be no basic conflict between *this* compromised revolution and any of the twenty or so others he lists. His ideal is large, it contains multitudes. He believes, for instance, that none of the older modern European values of learning are potentially out of harmony with the newer American values of easier-going family and social relations. "Bertrand Russell," Goodman writes, approvingly, "thought it was better if [students] had the sex, so they could give their undivided attention to mathematics, which was the main thing." Mathematics, he asserts elsewhere, is rooted in universal human nature, not merely in Greek and European culture. And finally, in his running battle with Dr. Conant, he remarks that the "unfolding individuality" of the child can never be in conflict with creative science or "the achievement of habits of science."

But are easy-going sex relations conducive to the kind of science that has come out of modern Europe? Is it likely that a well-integrated modern youngster will care to give the kind of devotion to science that helped produce Newton, Darwin and Freud? No wonder Dr. Conant is worried! Goodman does not really see the *cost* of the "permissiveness" revolution, nor the cost of civilization itself. He does not really see repression as a condition for higher culture. He cannot see society as an "outlet" for animal drives or the field for collective sublimations. Role playing is too superficial for him. He demands a more "positive" meaning to life. He wants a medieval community sense, a European tradition of learning, and an American equality and naturalness without in the least abandoning anything worthwhile. Obviously he is asking too much. Life is not disposed to respond so favorably to our ideal demands. But demands must continue to be made, we have been ignoring them at our peril, and I like Paul Goodman's manner of making them.

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BENJAMIN DE MOTT

In and Out of Storytown

SINCE ALL WRITING IS WRITING, the common prejudice against short fiction should be regarded as an affectation rather than as an idea. But to say this isn't to deny (what a glance at some of the books at hand confirms) that the power of the ordinary writer of short stories to inspire cynicism is superior to that of the ordinary novelist.[1] The power mentioned can be variously explained. Worship of speed, over-responsiveness to snippets that the critical vacuum has turned into doctrine (the pistol on the wall at the start of a tale must go off by the end)—these doubtless are factors. The anxiety they induce encourages the short fictionist to come on stage like a bush vaudevillian or a Storytown grip, shouting, wheeling a shiny bike (his theme), or grinning through a lasso (his swell plot). And the sight of so many props in an opening paragraph, such a quantity of fictional junk, rouses distrust that even the most obviously craftsmanlike novelist can suppress at least for a chapter. There are other explanations, to repeat—but none of them alters the fact. Competence in long forms increases a reader's respect for the major achievements of literary art; in short forms it brings to mind the aesthetic of Disneyland, which sees the imagination as a racket operated for kids.

Among English operators in the Storytown-Disneyland line H. E. Bates has for some years enjoyed high standing. Elizabeth Bowen says of him that he has "become a term of comparison," and while that phrase is often used senselessly about people who produce a barrel of books (*The Grapes of Paradise* is this writer's eighteenth title), it has some meaning here. Bates' literary personality sets a definite standard —for remoteness from the cultural realities of his period. It recalls a day when every writer had himself done in oils at twenty-five, belonged to Pall Mall instead of smoked it, sat at the captain's table at galas, was welcome to marry your sister, and felt free to complain to his journal about the Bishop's wife, if her gossip at somebody's dinner did in a "delightful donné." This does not mean that Bates is slow about sex; he invariably offers at least one Adults Only sentence per tale:

> She laughed again. With rising excitement he felt his hands slip to her breasts. Her thoughts were suddenly a racing jungle of bright impressions that included . . . the oleanders by the lakeside and the

[1] THE GRAPES OF PARADISE, by *H. E. Bates*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $3.75. SPRING SONG, by *Joyce Cary*. Harper. $3.95. THE GO-AWAY BIRD, by *Muriel Spark*. Lippincott. $3.75. AMONG THE DANGS, by *George P. Elliott*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $3.95. SHADOWS ON THE GRASS, by *Isak Dinesen*. Random House. $3.75.

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> lake itself, stretched like a blue glass lioness in the autumn sun. ("A Month by the Lake")

Neither does it mean that his writing is less than crisp and neat; the man is, in fact, unusually strong in words from nature and bold images (consider the "oleanders" and the "blue glass lioness") that give you the lyric lift. All that is meant is that Bates' literary voice speaks from the center of the good value position about literature—a position that reflects extreme loyalty to the great audience that knows what it likes, extreme impatience with the view that sex, poetry or truth should deter a writer from getting on with the bloody entertainment, extreme obliviousness to the news that everything he can do with his bloody entertainment has for years been done better by Granada and Rank.

The position described, as is plain, requires of the writer who wishes to maintain it a willingness to spend a lifetime in fantasyland, and it can be said for Bates that *The Grapes of Paradise* contains few hints that he is discontent with this fate. His little village, like other Story-towns, is a place of mockups first of all—big ones (Tahitian lagoons, Locarno steamers, U spots like Lausanne and Montreux) and little ones (tortoise-shell jewel boxes and jackdaws and pubs). It is occupied by guards officers with tremendous moustaches (bounders, of course), innocent girls named Christine, loose good-natured women named Ruby, neurotic housewives named Valerie Templeton, and bachelor manufacturers of light machinery named Major Wilsaw. As for the common life of the townsfolk—well, Christine robs the jewel box of the miserly old aunt on the third floor back, and the guards officer sports with Ruby after the golf club dance, and Major Wilsaw sows one wild oat at Como only to learn thereafter the proper worth of a patient English plainjane who's been watching him ever so amusedly. . . . The map thus offered does not, true enough, reveal every secret of Bates' hamlet: on occasion the Mayor runs off a sneak anti-romance. Where solider functionaries, imitators of Maugham or Conrad, would gasp at a Tahitian encounter that did not occur on a verandah over punch and a lagoon (two laconic types ironicizing each other), Bates has his interlocutors meet in a barber shop, introduces a Marlowe who prefers orange juice to rum, and trades up from the standard Polynesian dancing girl to one who is ugly and masochistic. But this amounts to no breach of faith: the tale in question is, finally, about sharks and passion, and is no better than it should be—not a word of it asks to be thought of as true. *The Grapes of Paradise* is Bates in his province, in short, laboring to establish—here at the eighteenth hole as where he began—that literature has something to offer even to the age of telly, Tony and indoor necking. It is only sad that the need for the offering cannot be called grave.

To speak of Joyce Cary in these or any disrespectful terms is to be cruel to the memory of a brave man, but there is enough to Cary's

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reputation to assure that it will survive honesty about one inferior book. *Spring Song* opens with tales of the Cameroons campaign: young coxcomb English officers learning to love the bush and to understand the native, casualties in the Horse Marines, a colonel "famous for his reckless dash," a Highlander parting with a beloved stallion but not with his accent ("To sell Satan, I couldn't forgeeve myself—though indeed the puir beastie could do with a home. . . ."). From here it advances to pantomimic turns by the Round Pond that show old men in brown bowlers dozing by wild boys aged three who are fresh off Nanny's leash. The latter pieces, which overtouchingly make the point that youth and age do not communicate, are built up on a principle that figures significantly in the more ambitious items in the book, namely that modernism equals sentimentality. In the tales about children the particular modernism in view is the idea that young people are attractive: Cary's reaction against Nesbit, Ransome, Milne and the rest is so intense that unruly children at a party can remind him of "French prints in which revolutionary mobs dance in the grand hall of Versailles, battering its polished floor with their brass-bound shoes." Like Golding he means in part to put "permissiveness" in its place; and like Golding he seems certain that the extravagance of hatred is a better guide to truth than the extravagance of Little-Dearism.

The question whether the principle just defined is better or worse than one asserting that modernism equals virtue is of course irrelevant. What matters is that Cary's acceptance of the principle leads him to reduce his stories to formulaic dirt-doings in which nonsense is confused with character. Again and again he begins a tale with a figure who is a projection of cant about divorce, psychoanalysis or rebellion, and thereafter works through a sequence of events designed to no purpose save that of demonstrating the stupidity of the whiner. A few of Cary's titles—as for example, "Period Piece"—suggest that he was self-conscious about his attraction to this pattern, one that is, after all, the mean staple of contemporary short story competence; but the self-consciousness rarely affected his text. The story named begins as follows:

> Tutin, married sixteen years, with three children, had an affair with his secretary, Phyllis, aged eighteen, and wanted a divorce. His wife, Clare, with her usual good sense, was resigned. 'If you feel you must make a break,' she said, sadly but without bitterness, 'there's no more to be said. It would be stupid to try to hold you against your will. You'd only hate me and that wouldn't help either of us.'
>
> But when her mother in remote Yorkshire heard of this arrangement, she wrote and said it was preposterous and wicked, and she wouldn't allow it. Old Mrs. Beer was the widow of a canon. She was a short stout woman with a red face and a heavy jaw—a pugnacious and indomitable face.

The proper names and the epithets fail to shift this conflict from the

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plane of ancients versus moderns, and as the story develops Cary shows less and less interest in accomplishing this end. He assures his reader that the Tutins are great discussers of everything on the most advanced principles, that they are forever "analyzing all the complex factors involved: Clare's feelings, the children's feelings, Phyllis's feelings, and everybody's right to consideration"—and the reader grasps at once that the correct response is to exclaim with the author: How these young idiots do maunder! In the sequel solid old Mrs. Beer descends on the house, abuses the secretary (who is revealed to be a floozie), breaks up the liaison, and restores harmony and the sense of responsibility. And the climax of this rigid progress from abstraction to abstraction occurs when the visit of the ancient to her united family produces a show of "self-satisfaction"—and hence an occasion for a setpiece of mechanized Storytown irony:

> For a moment [the husband] is astonished and irritated. Had the poor old thing really persuaded herself that her ideas had had anything to do with what no doubt she would call the salvation of his marriage? Did she really suppose that people hadn't changed in the last half-century, or realise that what might have been sense for her contemporaries in the 1890's, before psychology was even invented, was now a little out of date? Had she the faintest notion of the complex problems that he and Clare had had to face and solve, individual problems quite different from anyone else's, in which her antique rules of thumb had no more value than a screw-wrench to a thumbmaker? . . . For a moment [the husband] is inclined to tell her how little he agrees with her on the subject of divorce, but he thinks at once, 'Poor old thing, let her enjoy her little illusion' . . . [He] smiles as at a child who dwells in a world of phantasms.

Tales of this kind seem at first glance far more respectable than those of Tahiti buffs like Bates. They not only avoid the old mockups, they appear to uphold the Lawrence-Leavis virtues—home, mother and the like. But the appearance is spurious. The virtues that matter in fiction, for Lawrence and Leavis and most people of sense, are those which begin in a full responsiveness to life rather than in Tory sentiment—and it is just this responsiveness that is absent from the stories of *Spring Song*. The lesson of the book, though hardly of Cary's career, is that the resources for the production of unreality nowadays are not limited to Como and the South Pacific; they include, in addition, an indulgence in the notion that the bones of men are their silly opinions and that short fiction is a proper place to break them.

This lesson needs no noble teacher, as is demonstrated by several of the pieces in Muriel Spark's first collection: items springing forth from that contempt for cant which, as already indicated, is so remarkably easy to distinguish (in stories) from the love of truth. Whether Mrs. Spark is giving comeuppance to liberal types snobbish with "tol-

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erance," or to "happily married" country couples who in reality seethe with buried hatreds, she begins with the cant, not with the person. And her tone announces unreservedly, when at length the person appears, that unlike non-Storytown types this figure is not meant to become more than a notion despised. A description of a *chic* heroine illustrates the tick of reductiveness:

> I found that literature and politics took up most of Daisy's days and many of her nights. She wrote a regular column in a small political paper and she belonged to all the literary societies. Thus, it was the literature of politics and the politics of literature which occupied Daisy, and thus she bamboozled many politicians who thought she was a writer, and writers who believed her to be a political theorist. But these activities failed to satisfy, that is to say, intoxicate her. ("Daisy Overend")

The presentation of a childless couple in a New Town council flat is not markedly different:

> The Parkers went to the pictures only when *The Observer* had praised the film; they considered television not their sort of thing; they adhered to their religion; they voted Labour; they believed that the twentieth century was the best so far; they assented to the doctrine of original sin; they frequently applied the word 'Victorian' to ideas and people they did not like—for instance, when a local Town Councillor resigned his office, Raymond said, 'He had to go. He's a Victorian. And far too young for the job;' and Lou said Jane Austen's books were too Victorian; and anyone who opposed the abolition of capital punishment was Victorian. Raymond took the *Reader's Digest,* a magazine called *Motoring* and *The Catholic Herald.* Lou took *The Queen, Woman's Own* and *Life.* Their daily paper was *The News Chronicle.* ("The Black Madonna")

And the pattern of both tales is once again that of the formulaic dirt-doing on sentimentality. The childless couple in "The Madonna" have two bachelor Jamaican friends of whom they are proud; they tell the unilluminated and the prejudiced of their neighborhood that "We're all equal . . . Don't forget there are black Bishops." Then, by an odder accident than would be expected, the couple has a child—a black baby—and it is promptly put out for adoption:

> 'If that child was mine,' said [a neighbor], 'I'd never part with her. I wish we could afford to adopt another. She's the loveliest little darkie in the world.'
>
> 'You wouldn't think so,' said [Mrs. Parker], 'if she really was yours. Imagine it for yourself, waking up to find you've had a black baby that everyone thinks has a nigger for its father.'

It is ever thus in Storytown: idealism shown its corruption, stick figures beaten with sticks.

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There are other devices in *The Go-Away Bird* that operate only a shade less mechanically than Mrs. Spark's reducing machine for liberals, and that are readily seen as the inventions of the same rapid, clever, cynical mind which shines like a lucid loin in *Memento Mori* and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*—the novels that have lately strengthened this writer's American reputation. Sci-Fi and supernaturalism figure in "The Portobello Road," "The Seraph and the Zambesi," and "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse"—pieces about reincarnation, flying saucers, talking corpses and other subjects of interest to the audience of *Punch* (that magazine has in fact printed Mrs. Spark) or of Roald Dahl. But the title piece of the collection is fiction at an altogether different level. It is a theme-ridden story, perhaps—the song of the go-away bird bids the reader too frequently to dwell on the cycle of aspiration-frustration; and the sentences dart too nervously, like ravenous thin winter squirrels; and there are figures in the margins—an ironical colonial drunk, a stuffy opportunistic novelist—who were born and will die in books. But at the center of the tale lies matter that mere competence could not accommodate: an act of revenge that defines an unexpectedly complex set of South African relationships—among natives, Dutch (or Afrikaans), and English who have forgotten England; an account of the fleecing of a girl sent up into nasty London hands for a deb's experience of the Season ("I'm sorry, my dear, but one just can't be sentimental. It's not like taking in ordinary lodgers . . . Mercy Slater charges fifteen hundred to bring a girl out"); and, last, a design that links the separate worlds not in a theory about civilization and its opposite, but in a vision of the neurotic intransigence that every world is asked to respect as feeling. The story, which is neither pretentious nor effortfully understated, shows forth a situation less open to political understanding than any developed in the South African fiction of Gordimer or Lessing or Jacobson; it redeems this collection and stands as Mrs. Spark's most considerable achievement to date.

Not the least important difference between George P. Elliott and the writers discussed above is that when Elliott sets out to abuse stupidity or cant he makes no effort to tease his reader into believing that his tale is only a simple yarn about folks. His tone in such undertakings is cold and impersonal—"anthropological," says the dust jacket: the position attacked is not swathed in cosy pretenses of sympathy, and no bogus individuals are puffed up to represent it. A story called "Faq' " rejects the orderly life of fact as that appears, not in some tarted-up "central character," but in the generalized tribal life of Faq' (a remote African village where all is number). The result is abstract in quality, to be sure. The narrator of the piece ends by remarking that the person who found Faq' "is determined never to go there again, for he is sure that though he does not know what is right for men ordered perfection is wrong, and that though suffering is bad the lack of suf-

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fering is much worse." And since nothing in the tale can be thought of as challenging this sentiment, the expression of it at the conclusion gives the story the air of an argument. The argument is, however, honorably remote from the sleazy conventions spoken of before, and the impression it leaves is of integrity.

The same impression is left by those stories in *Among the Dangs* that do not develop as abstract argument. Elliott's themes in these pieces lend themselves to cheap schematization; he repeatedly begins with familiar contrasts—vulgarity versus purity, the world of commerce versus the world of faith. But the contrasts almost invariably are complicated by direct knowledge that resists the clichés both of fiction and of contemporary social criticism. "Hymn of the Angels" is about negotiations between a record company executive named Goldfarb and a group of monkish singers who own the manuscripts of some rare pre-Gregorian hymns. The intensity of the latter about art and faith is defined without cynicism, and the writer does not turn aside from the obvious vulgarities of the businessman. Goldfarb moves from conversation with priests to conversation with a slut (about "musical monks"); his imagination is furry with greed ("Countertenors, there's a market opening up for them . . ." "He was thinking of the record slipcover: 'THE MONKS OF MOUNT MARY PRESENT LOST TREASURES' "). And when the music for which he has been negotiating is at length brought to his ear—moving Latin sonorities and "safe" voluptuousness—he does not say to himself: I must change my life. He retreats rapidly from his experience as a listener to his role as an entrepreneur; his attempt to express the experience issues only in an account of his plans for exploiting it. But he is not denied a moment of genuine response, and it is in the effort to focus this response precisely that Elliott discovers his theme.

The theme is that of inoperable beauty, the dependence of feeling upon expression. For, as Elliott presents him, this businessman is neither a dead soul nor a splendid potency: he is a man without a language that could make the best of his experience active in his imagination:

> [Goldfarb] wanted to think about the music and his experience of hearing it, which still glowed inside him. But both the music and his experience listening to it had been so different from any he knew that he had no words to talk about them with. He could not even talk to himself about them. Intensity, strangeness, and loss of words —he shook himself and set his attention on business.

The turn here is away from argument and contrivance and toward truth of the sort that nowadays turns up occasionally in works of social observation—as in Richard Hoggart's chapters about working-class sensitivities—but is not often encountered in fiction. Lower Storytown would rush Goldfarb into the monastery for life; upper Storytown

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would have him steal the manuscripts for a "surprise special" of the Four Freshmen on the Sullivan Show; Elliott avoids both slums and leaves the figure as he will probably be found.

And, to repeat, this piece is not an exception to the rule of the volume. "Brother Quintillian and Dick the Chemist" is rigidly organized to establish differences and likenesses between a griefstruck atheist and a man of agonized faith, each of whom contends against torment by defining "personal," quasi-intellectual goals. But the writer does not yield to the abstractness of his design; the plain, eccentric qualities of both figures are kept constantly in sight, with the result that while the artificial analogy between strains of reason and strains of faith is losing force, a patient, untendentious realization of two middling American professionals is being achieved. Even in those stories in which Elliott's purpose is clearly reductive—as for example in "Children of Ruth," where like Mrs. Spark he means to take down a political upholsteress—the too easy task comes quickly to bore him. The tale emerges as a piece of a family novel, a chaos of American originals —chess players and motorcyclists and reluctant sorority girls—in which every figure is allowed to be more than a tendency. Important reservations are to be added, of course: Elliott is not lucky in his choice of subjects, the vivacity of certain of his essays does not appear in his fiction, and none of the stories in this book has been produced out of the kind of imaginative strength that lays fierce hands on the reader and drives him at its own pace. But the reservations do not alter the fact that the author of *Among the Dangs* is a man for whom a story is not a toy but a pursuit of truth, and it follows from this that the discovery by him of a thoroughly exciting subject will be a literary event.

The publication of Isak Dinesen's latest African volume, *Shadows on the Grass,* was an event, and the weekly and monthly press did well by it. The pieces it contains—rambling memories of faithful retainers, accounts of amateur medical work among natives—do not qualify as stories: the writer moves from subject to subject carelessly in each of them, and the final section, "Echoes from the Hills," ravels out into relative inconsequence ("Last March I had a letter from an American lady of the University of Maryland. A fortnight before, she had been dining with a Danish economist just back from a recent mission to East Africa; they had been talking about me and my book *Out of Africa,* and he had told her that at the Danish Consulate at Tanganyika he had been given information which he wanted to bring to my attention.") But the collection does focus some truths about literary art that give pleasure in themselves—as for example the truth that a story is not a rumble of events but a coherence of understandings expressed in a voice that elevates the objects understood. What is meant by elevation? Consider the names of the colonial English in this volume—Denys Finch-Hatton, Berkeley Cole, and the rest: any aging

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Angry could turn them to tin in a paragraph, and even without an Angry as a guide the names look like standard Storytown pointers, signs of port-drinkers sick with blimpishness or guilt. But in this writer's pages such names reverberate like those of heroes. The reason is not that brave deeds have been performed by the figures in question; the reason is that the personal qualities of the narrator serve as a guarantee that any figures admitted to her conversation and spoken of as her equals have risen above the lance of reductive irony.

The personal qualities mentioned—cunning, intensity, wit, superb courage, a ferociously practical idealism—are usually placed in what is called the feudal or aristocratic context, and that strategy is comfortable: the emptiness in the eyes of Miss Rheingold and Holly Golightly would depress no one if the view were correct that saw it as a consequence simply of lost historical and geographical advantages. But accepting this view means explaining away into the "cultural heritage" Miss Dinesen's gift for dignified self-creation—a mistaken course of action. "I wouldn't mind calling this Isak Dinesen up," says Holden Caulfield—and no doubt the Baroness Karen Blixen of Rungstedlund, locked in the habits of *noblesse oblige,* would be perfectly decent on the phone. But her literary character, Isak Dinesen, could not have much to say: being completely unversed in self-pity. *Shadows on the Grass* tells of the native custom of carrying dead men out to the plain from the village, where they are left for "the quick and neat cleaning and polishing of jackals and vultures, then of the lions coming down from the hills." Miss Dinesen signifies her approval by acknowledging that she had instructed her servants, in the event of her death, to bring her body out to the plain in the track of her squatters—and as she does so her voice rises a little to insist on the elevation of the "castrum doloris . . . under the big firmament, with its wild, free, gluttonous undertakers," to claim drama and nobility for this climax. But the swell of feeling does not disturb her poise; the voice runs on almost casually through reverberant phrases—"The silent all-embracing genius of consent"—until it is prepared to resume the tale it had meant to tell. Gifts of this artist that drew praise on the appearance of her earlier books—the jacket of the present work speaks of a "surehanded wizardry in communicating the character of [African] people"—are not strikingly evident in the new stories at hand. But the extraordinary self of the writer remains intact, strange in its complication, admirable in its linkages of skepticism and religious responsiveness (to landscape, animals, history), sentiment and fury, idealism and sternness about limits. Confronting it you are raised straight up from Storytown—that roadside-bedside ashpit where dwarfs and princesses have been replaced by liberal hypocrites and temperate Tahitians—to the true theater of fiction, where the force of real beings creates a world of valuable, serious things.

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RICHARD FOSTER

What is Fiction For?[1]

FOR DELIGHT AND INSTRUCTION, of course, as everyone knows. But other words, qualifiers and clarifiers, nevertheless want to push themselves into the answer because as moderns we cannot afford to be as trusting as Horace. For one thing, we know, in our wistful modern decadence, that not all fiction, perhaps only very little of it, is literature; and that means that not all of it is to be taken with full human seriousness. The newspaper reviews I had seen of Elizabeth Spencer's *The Light in the Piazza,* evoking a memorable tradition of serious fictions (Hawthorne, James, Howells, Edith Wharton) about Americans tragically or comically finding Life in Italy, seemed to give promise of something richly good. Everyone by now must know the plot: Mrs. Johnson, wife of a well-to-do American Philistine, takes her beautiful but mentally retarded twenty-six year old daughter Clara to Italy in order to distract her from sex (!); but Clara immediately falls joyously and innocently in love with a young Italian who also loves her; first Mrs. Johnson resists and evades the match in horror and despair, and then, riding with the momentum of romance and renewal, brings the marriage to consummation over the opposition of her absent husband and the last-minute reluctance of the young Italian's father; Mrs. Johnson has also been having an obvious but quite subliminal affair of the heart with Signor Naccarelli, this warm-blooded, magnificent-mannered father, and this makes us know that Clara's marriage is a proxy fulfillment for the stunted emotional life of Mrs. Johnson.

Miss Spencer has published three earlier books to high critical praise, she has received several important literary awards and fellowships, and *The Light in the Piazza* comes highly recommended by important literary critics. And so I am especially sorry to begin this review of fiction by saying that in my opinion the book is just not literature. The insistent remarkableness of its abstractly ironic situation, unless massively ballasted with the real, would put it in danger of being (to adapt a most useful phrase of Donald Hall's) an "idea-for-a-story story"; alas, there is nothing real about it, and it becomes an all-too perfect occasion for indulging in the smart attitudinizings and sensitive introspectings characteristic of the sophisticated self-image of

[1] THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA, by *Elizabeth Spencer.* McGraw-Hill. $3.00. THE WHITE STONE, by *Carlo Coccioli.* Simon and Schuster. $4.50. THE GENERAL, by *Alan Sillitoe.* Knopf. $3.00. THE NEPHEW, by *James Purdy.* Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $3.95. VANGEL GRIFFIN, by *Herbert Lobsenz.* Harper. $4.50. THEREFORE BE BOLD, by *Herbert Gold.* Dial. $3.95. THE LAST OF THE JUST, by *Andre Schwarz-Bart.* Atheneum. $4.95. RABBIT, RUN, by *John Updike.* Knopf. $3.95.

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the sex and class it is written about and, apparently, for. It is high-level *Woman's Day*. (*The New Yorker* published it in its original form.) The characters are almost total blanks; they are not even types, they are merely roles, and one fills in from one's stored experience of stock modern romance, most of it cinematic. I used the faces and voices of Deborah Kerr (Mrs. Johnson) and Vittorio DeSica (Signor Naccarelli) to keep the thing in focus. Clara and Fabrizio are so far in the distance that all one needs for them is occasional sunlight falling on golden hair, and some spontaneous and graceful jumping about. And finally, the writing seems to me often very bad—vacant, high-falutin, ostentatiously tremulous:

> Signor Naccarelli turned back to Mrs. Johnson before he followed his son from the lobby. There were tears in her eyes; she thought perhaps she observed something of the same in his own. At any rate, he was moved. He grasped her hand tightly, and his kiss upon it as he left her said to her more plainly than words, she believed, that they had shared together a beautiful and touching moment.

The Light in the Piazza is full of such thrilling continental gestures, rich with such throbbing moments of Female Insight. I hope Miss Spencer's other books are, and will be, better—*truer*—than this one. Mark Schorer's likening it, on the dust jacket, to Henry James and Katherine Anne Porter seems badly mistaken simply because, though it is very literary, it is not literature.

My other books, not all of them good ones, *are* literature because they are serious about reality—which is to say that they try to give truthful and revealing images of human beings and their attempts to create or discover order and meaning in the apparent chaos of thing and value that is our modern real. The real is all there is for fiction-makers of all types—poets and playwrights as well as novelists. And because it is all there is, too, for just plain people, and is therefore of such desperate human importance, a writer is in danger if, intentionally or not, he is untrue to it: it will annihilate him by screaming its derision in our minds as we read. It is a slippery and hazardous thing to be a serious writer because you are so deeply committed to the truth.

The serious European novelist of modern times (the archetypes: Dostoievski, Mann, Camus) has tended to frame the worlds of his fiction at the mental end of the spectrum of the real; he writes the "novel of ideas," and he uses the material real, the things and passions of "experience," quite simply to weigh down and color the world of thought and moral possibility that his characters questioningly inhabit. Such fictions go up in a steam of vagueness or blunder into mechanicalness when the simple actualities, however subordinate they may be to ideas, are not dealt with clearly and truly. Carlo Coccioli's *The White Stone* is a novel of ideas in the most extreme European manner.

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Though it is supposed also to reflect recent history—the War, its concentration camps, its aftermath of exhaustion—the facts of that history are little more than incidental allusions to actuality. The book tells of a writer's search, through memoirs, letters, documents, and the observations and memories of friends and acquaintances, for the spiritual truth about a priest's loss of faith in God during the War. The truth is a metaphysical paradox: the priest has lost his faith in God because, in a wartime moment's blinding revelation of the reality of Satan, he has *become* God. Every conversation and rumination of every character in the book is a speculation upon this paradox; every impulse, gesture, act is a symbolic gloss on it. Nobody accidentally spills a glass of wine, hears the rumbling of his own bowels, reacts to the weather, eavesdrops on a neighbor's quarrel out of brute curiosity. And because nothing is "wasted" in the book, it is, for me, suffocatingly unreal—an earnest mental compulsion laboriously and awkwardly and half-heartedly pretending to be fiction.

The new novels of James Purdy and Alan Sillitoe are more purely *stories* than Coccioli's, and thus they are concerned more with the other end of the spectrum of the real—with thing, passion, action, and action's consequence. Like Miss Spencer, both writers have been struck, obviously, by the dramatic potentials of a strenuously ironic situation. Purdy has a smug, elderly, straight-laced woman dedicatedly search out the reality of a beloved and idealized nephew who has turned up missing in the Korean War; along the way she uncovers the secret frustrations, temptations, and sins of friends, neighbors, and fellow townsmen—the "realities" of life by which, as she finally discovers, even the nephew has been tainted and blessed. Sillitoe's situation is rather more virtuoso, perhaps. A symphony orchestra, traveling to the front in wartime to play for the troops, is captured during a battle by the barbaric enemy; the enemy general is ordered by the High Command to liquidate the orchestra with the same briskness as other prisoners; but the general, something of an intellectual, dreads the act, delays, listens to a concert, begins to crack under the pressure of his moral dilemma, and finally sacrifices not only his own position and safety but the war itself (which he has been winning) in order to save the orchestra and give it its freedom.

The plots of both books are a bit too carefully arranged for conviction: Sillitoe's in the stark "originality" of its very conception, and Purdy's in the uncomfortable gimmick ("What would you say if I wrote a short account of Cliff's career? . . . A kind of record, just for us. . . .") that enables the old aunt to go in her long pursuit of her nephew's truth. But the most serious trouble lies in each author's guilty need to justify his thriller with large doses of Thought. Speaking approximately, as Coccioli falsified actuality, Purdy and Sillitoe falsify ideas: a counterfeiting of reality takes place in both cases. Purdy's is a stock literary message we have heard too often, and he

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purveys it with a telling limpness and weariness: "We none of us, I'm afraid, know anybody or know one another"; and, to love someone is "all we dare hope for in this life." Sillitoe builds on a dialectic that is just as bookish, but rather more stagey: "We're both fighters," says the General, preening, during one of his long interviews with the equally pompous and vain Conductor, "drumming our troops into battle at opposite poles, both trying to conquer the world in our different ways. And because our ways are different and our music such great distances apart, one of us must go." A pert "Balderdash!" or a bored "Uh-huh . . ." are the appropriate responses to things of this sort, depending on your nationality.

Sillitoe has made his reputation as a realist of working-class English life, and I understand that with *The General* he is quite consciously abandoning all that for wider literary horizons. *The General* suggests to me that this course may be mistaken. James Purdy is sometimes referred to as one of the "school of evil." Though I wanted to believe in the image of Dorothy Parker holding both her sides as she read it, I found his celebrated *Malcolm* contrived, wooden, and anything but funny; and in spite of all its quasi-allegorical paraphernalia of implication, quite depthless. The lifelessness and depthlessness of the more straightforward *The Nephew* seems to confirm those feelings. Purdy has the instincts of the moralist, obviously, and he is very American in his manners. He reminds one of Hawthorne inevitably. But he is a toneless Hawthorne, a mechanical Hawthorne, and thus a Hawthorne only on the surface—lacking the icy passion for debauches of moral confrontation that made Hawthorne's genius. Purdy clomps along and makes many pale (a Hawthornian self-epithet, but I can't avoid it) and shallow images of moral problems and worried absolutes; but they seem unimpelled and related to nothing in particular outside themselves. I don't like to think of Purdy content to go on writing in this vein.

Herbert Lobsenz, author of *Vangel Griffin,* this year's Harper Prize Novel, is a young man of great comic talent. He owns the skill of a limber, racy style; he has a sharp eye for the telling gesture or tone that lays bare for ruthless scorn the silly identities of class, type, or tribe; and he is a master of magnificently operatic scenes of comic climax—massive, magniloquent, crowded with people and error—set-pieces of gigantistic absurdity unparalleled since the golden days of Laurel and Hardy. And when Mr. Lobsenz lets his comic talent lead him he is also intelligent, sometimes even wise. But, alas, *Vangel Griffin* is what is coming to be spoken of quite casually in this country as a "picaresque" novel. "Picaresque-*type*" novel would be a better designation because that so American barbarism fits with such homely propriety the American barbarization of true picaresque that this novel, and others like it now in vogue, represent. True picaresque is more than a loose-lined anecdotal comic fiction, it is (was?) also a

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frame of mind. And true picaresque is more than a vehicle of "satire"; it is a cackling cry of deprecation from so far down the human scale of respectability or so far out from the borders of mechanical society that it can hazard total truth. (There is nothing to be lost.) And the only thing that cannot be admitted to picaresque's wide realm of reality—except for purposes of morbidly jolly orgies of debunking—is Romance. It is exactly Romance, *moral* Romance, of course, that corrupts current American picaresque, that fills its baggy form with sentimental humanism, coy charm, and shovelsful of glossy social didacticism.

In spite of the fact that Lobsenz' hero is a trite young American professional man who rather tritely throws up his marriage and career to taste Life for a year in Spain, the novel gets off to a pretty good start. It starts lambastingly funny with Vangel's whomping seduction by Satry, his joyously single-minded Spanish girlfriend. But soon the book begins to slip its reins of comedy and intelligence. The corn begins to flower. Satry becomes a kind of heavily theme-ridden sexual schoolmarm, patiently teaching her American boy the lesson of his manhood. And her magnificently absurd and touching quixotic-idealist brother turns gradually into a ponderous, self-elucidating Christ-figure. In true-false American fashion, the book ends as a great, solemn, progressive morality. Once the hero has been educated in his responsibility as a citizen (oh shades of American Lit Survey!—educated by Europe-as-Experience!), and it costs Mr. Lobsenz seas of Spanish blood and tears to get this one American to go home again, Vangel returns pluckily to wife, child, and country to organize programs for the creation of a better America. The tides of vague positive thinking are nosehigh at the end. *Vangel Griffin* is often a very amusing book. But it is in the end false, and immensely irritating for failing all its promises with such strenuous vigor.

Herbert Gold's new novel, *Therefore Be Bold,* is much more modest in its intentions than *Vangel Griffin.* Literature need not always strive; sometimes it simply yields and drifts. *Therefore Be Bold* is essentially an entertainment; a humorous yielding to rose-hazed human nostalgia. It is an extemporized, anecdotal ramble about growing into adolescence in a suburb of Cleveland during the late thirties. But it is a frequently laborious entertainment, nevertheless; an often exhausting, rather than refreshing and diverting, excursion into the comedy of youth. And the exhaustion is caused by—of all things—*style.* Mr. Gold has an extraordinary talent for style, but also a great weakness for it; he is in danger of becoming a *stylist.* As Shakespeare, according to Dr. Johnson, would sometimes trade all sense for the achievement of a pun, Gold will trade it for a frill, or sometimes even a trill. His style is by nature a vehicle of warm and intelligent humor, and when it is properly limited, leashed, and pommeled into obedience, it does its work well and charmingly. Gold can be very, very funny; or expressive;

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or even brilliant in little perfect flashes of incidental observation or conversation. Like, "She let us watch her spread the green harp-shaped cover over the gold harp-shaped harp." Or, "Boswell is just as famous as Olsen and Johnson." Or, "In Lakewood we always took nay for the voice of tradition, authority, and virtue; everyone said nay but the milkman's horse." But often there is a regrettable muddying of perception by style—an overstyling that blinds or distracts or blurs the eye that is supposed to see something more clearly with the style's help:

> Lucile had a busy face . . . : the colors of her eyes whirling with their contained energy like that of a barber pole, twining forever inward upon its absent self while you expected it to go sailing off to penetrate the heavens. When she smiled a crinkle of fuss appeared in two taut harpstrings between her eyes; the remainder of her fatherless face protested cutely at amusement above the tomboy shirt with its lining of the first female buttons; the lean rump, quick as a firefly, dodged and leaped in athletics designed to avoid laughter. She was our gorgeous agile firefly, our super deluxe V-8 cricket with its tail ablaze, possessed by light and a deep squeaking.

Such rococo stylistics, rather than aiding either portraiture or characterization, merely distract or obfuscate. A lot of rockets have gone off and bells tinkled, but I haven't been left with the least impression in the world of old Lucile. On top of that, the general truth of the teenager coming into his sexual maturity, his essential pitiful sordidness, is falsified by such style. The youth of this book seem to be acting charming roles for some hidden camera they know about; even the dopes and the creeps come out far too improbably cute and cleanly. The theme of the book is "Love me quick, someone! . . . Give me strength! Give me reason! Give me purpose!" Well, all right. But *fifteen* year olds aren't so delightful as to say, page after page, things so unironically rollicking as, "There's a book tells you how to live right, be healthy and strong, otherwise you get prostrate glands. . . . I sent away for it in a plain wrapper."

There is a splendid short story swaddled in this book, and my general feeling is that since Gold had that he shouldn't have worried about wrapping all the rest around it to make a novel. This story, which comes toward the end of the book, is about the terrifying, and at the same time grotesquely comic confrontation of Dan Berman, the fifteen-year-old hero, with the sick-in-body-and-mind, Jew-hating, proto-Fascist, middle class father of Dan's bitchy and sexy little sweetheart. All Gold's talent for style functions to make this a memorably funny, poignant, and nightmarish initiation of youth into the idiocies and horrors of sexual and political reality. It's the payoff for the earlier hard going.

Herbert Gold is the only valid heir I can think of in our current literature to the special vision and tone of Scott Fitzgerald. I am thinking, for a prime example, of the long short story "Love and Like." He

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has Fitzgerald's mixture of ribaldry and warmth, scorn and sweetness, and he has the hovering elegiac feeling that weaves itself through his sophistication. And he has the Fitzgerald weaknesses, too—the proneness to mannerism and smartness. It is perhaps that both writers are inherently social sorts of intelligences born into eras of passive deperation where they find it too easy to work off their responses in wit and glitter. Both, significantly, yearn toward cataclysm. And it is cataclysm that André Schwarz-Bart tells about, as an accomplished fact of history, in his unforgettably searing *The Last of the Just.*

Understandably, Europe is less able to forget the War, less able to sublimate it into a mere aura of the imagination, than America has been. You can tell a European novelist, it seems,—at least in the cases of Coccioli, Sillitoe, and Schwarz-Bart—by his inability to avoid the War as a direct *referent* of his imagination. It is a more distant reality, at least until the hero meets his girlfriend's father, for Gold. And the distance of war's discordant music is what is so piquantly true, at heart, about the moral relation of *Therefore Be Bold,* as an image of our American experience, to our historical actuality:

> . . . While we learned to have faces, we were hearing about Poland and Hitler, Spain and Hitler, Mussolini and Hitler. On a test we were asked five differences between democracy and Nazism, and were given extra credit for additional, optional reasons, such as, In a democracy all men respect each other . . , or Nazzi-ism was invented in Munich, Germany, whereas democracy came to light in Athens, Greece . . , or, Jewish opera singers can no longer sing in Germany and also Albert Einstein discoverer of relativity had to flee. . . .

And meantime, in Germany, sick with the anti-Semitic brutalities of the German schoolroom under the Nazis, little Ernie Levy, who is to become the last of Schwarz-Bart's crucified Just Men, tries vainly to kill himself by slashing his wrists in the toilet and throwing himself, bleeding, from the window of his ghetto bedroom.

The Last of the Just is clumsy and uneven as art. It is a shapeless and unbalanced quasi-history of Jewish persecutions and holy heroisms in the Levy line of God-appointed Just Men from twelfth century York to twentieth century Auschwitz. Some parts are underdeveloped in relation to others, and between stretches of the greatest intensity there sometimes appear passages that show weariness and the vagueness of haste. The characterization, while vivid, is rarely deep and complex. And the dialectic of good and evil is founded in stock contrasts that amount almost to caricature—the childlike spontaneous Jew vs. the frothing, mad-dog Nazi. The translator, finally, appears sometimes to strain too hard to catch the furor or lambency of his original.

But none of this matters in the ordinary ways because the book is not properly a novel at all. It is a cry, a rhapsody, the agonized rendering of the myth of a tragic people, the epic of one of the great in-

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eradicable guilts of Western history—a guilt that Americans especially, far from it all, cannot afford to be spared the deep knowledge of. It would be a macabre impertinence to discuss *The Last of the Just* as a novel—only a proof of how lost and foolish we are. It is simply an indispensable human testament.

Rabbit, Run, strictly from the point of view of what fiction is for, Instruction and Delight together and in harmony, is the best of this lot. It is an absorbing, serious, painful, and in its modest way—perhaps *because* of its modesty—beautiful rendering of man's self-entrapment in this time and place, and of the havoc made in himself and others when he makes a blind and impulsive run for freedom. Rabbit Angstrom, a former highschool basketball star who played for the poetry and grace of the game, has married a sordid world: a dumb wife, television and booze, wailing kids, a demonstrator's job in the five-and-dime, and the frustration, aridity, and dull misery that go with all of that. The story is about his breaking and running, not from "reality," but from everything and everyone that denies instinct and aspiration. As a runner he is "life" to an ancient lady whose rhododenrons he gardens back into blooming; he is a "mystic" to a humane but faithless Episcopal priest waiting for rain; he is "Mr. Death himself" to the women he invades and the children he breeds in them for life or death, as chance will have it. Once he has let himself free of his trap, he manifests the dangerous force of utter selfhood. And when, out of the same natural urges—affection, appetite, need, habit, the sheer direction of an energy released—he goes back to wife and child and job, he can't stay, and has to cut free and run again because they, the world and its religion of consequences, don't know about his truth: the truth that "goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside. . . ." Rabbit is still running at the end.

Rabbit, Run is memorable as a rendering of our obese American life of the fifties and sixties—the weltering, crowding universes of contending things and distractions, and their death-pressings upon the spirits of the dumb and simple who cannot encompass them. Updike shows himself in the spiritual and artistic tradition of Nathanael West; there is the same blend of sordidness and ecstasy, hilarity and vision, the same miraculous manifesting of spirit from the debauch of crass contemporaneity. This is a good and vital tradition, for our time especially, because of its deeply humanistic commitment. Mr. Updike shares in the tradition, but he is his own unmistakable man—no imitator. He is an original in the best sense.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

Canadian Lights, Flashes and Fizzles[1]

I HAVE HAD SIMPLE IDEAS ABOUT CANADA, based on a little reading, an old movie starring Jeannette Macdonald and Nelson Eddy, and a visit to Toronto. Wolfe on the Heights of Abraham, the Indian Love Call, and a businessman quoting statistics of Toronto's growing industry—the simple picture is one I've been unwilling to relinquish, in a world that is becoming unbearably complex. And Canada, being in the British family, has sometimes given the impression that her literature, like her politics, is a family affair.

Northern Lights, an anthology of Canadian prose, does not obscure the simple picture. These are all Canadian authors; that's why they are together in a book. But really, they belong to the great international sisterhood of purveyors of *kitsch.* They write the clear, wholesome, sentimental fiction that is doled out in *Macleans, The Ladies' Home Journal,* and equivalent periodicals in London, Paris and Milan. Just change the dress, turn the French-Canadian farmer's wife into a Swedish nursemaid, and you have a perfect story for the Scandinavian market. These stories could be about any people anywhere, and if you think I mean this as a compliment, you're mistaken.

Why should I read a novel titled *Sacrifice,* the epic of a family of immigrant Jews, in which every possible cliché about birth, marriage and death, found in every novel to date about immigrant families, is spelled out again? True, this novel has an original ending. The hero, when he was a boy, was compelled to butcher a cow, against his religious beliefs; at the end of the novel he picks up a knife and butchers a lady of easy virtue. It is certainly a surprise, but the religious or general significance escapes me. Did I have to read this melodrama because it was by a Canadian?

The same goes for a novelette, also in *Northern Lights,* about a dismal spinster named "Judith Hearne." She has the usual troubles spinsters have, which were better described by Katherine Mansfield, in considerably less space, many years ago. This story is also "realistic." That is, it's about ordinary life and representative characters. The scenery looks convincing.

Mazo de la Roche, who introduces the anthology, has a word for people like me: "To condemn makes the critic appear clever. He is noticed where otherwise he might live and die unnoticed."

It seems we are to read this junk *and* like it.

[1] NORTHERN LIGHTS, selected by *George E. Nelson.* Doubleday. $4.95. CANADIAN SHORT STORIES, selected by *Robert Weaver.* Oxford University Press. $2.75. THE OXFORD BOOK OF CANADIAN VERSE, edited by *A. J. M. Smith.* Oxford University Press. $7.50.

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The question is, Why, when there is television, and a movie down the street, should we read this sort of stuff at all? I can get the same characterizations, the same situations, and better scenery (in technicolor), by twisting a dial. This kind of fiction is obsolete; machines do the same thing better; obsolescence is always the fate of *kitsch.*

If the reader thinks I'm being hard on this fizz of an aurora borealis, he should know also that the anthology includes an article by Dr. Marion Hilliard, "An Open Letter to Husbands," about fading virility and the need of a sense of humor. It ends on this note: "The light in his eye is laughter." Truly, a book that should be in every guest-room. At least, it's the kind I always find in guest-rooms.

What looks like a chamber of commerce also gets into the act, with an article on "The Legend of Headless Valley." Figuring this might be a kind of Sleepy Hollow story, I tied on my snow shoes and plunged ahead. The beginning was all about Edmonton, which, as the author tells you, "rightly calls itself the Gateway to the North." I don't mind Edmonton calling itself that; after all, those Canadian nights get pretty dreary, and they have to pass the time somehow. But the author kept saying it too. Then again, the article was frontier heroics of a kind I last saw in *Chums,* all about husky men and the planes they flew over tundra and Arctic, to carry serum to dying settlements and bring in uranium and pelts. I didn't stick it out to the Legend; but, from the tone of what came before, it wasn't going to be in the vein of Irving—more like Robert Service. It was the Headless misled me.

My last try was a short story, "The Firing Squad." It told how a Canadian officer in Italy, having disgraced himself in combat, was assigned to command a firing-squad and execute a boy who had been convicted of murder on some technicality. After one or two talks with the Padre, the officer—whose name was Adam—at the last moment refused to give the order to fire. An onlooker exclaimed: "God help Adam now." The Padre replied, "Don't worry about that, son. . . . He already has." It was very fine, and I didn't believe it for a moment.

It must be hard to be a Canadian writer, for certain reasons. One disadvantage is indicated by *Northern Lights.* If you live in a boarding-house in a raw settlement, a room at the Royal York Hotel must look very tempting, and a ladies' lunch club sound like Parnassus. Before you're able to write a page of truth, you've learned how to turn out a serial for the slicks. Then, in that bracing climate, it must be hard to go to the dogs—and going to the dogs, at some time or other, is necessary to the serious writer. Maybe all the weaklings go South; at any rate, the look (almost the smell) of pines and maples and sparkling water, which I got from the Macdonald-Eddy movie, pervades much of Canadian fiction. Yet, Russia has a bracing climate too, and Trotsky managed to get some writing done in Siberia.

The good difficulty you might expect to find in these Lights is missing—that is, the difficulty of working next to a wilderness. The pre-

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occupations that have been with us since Twain—the need to use a new language, to cast off outworn conventions, to translate the new landscape into imagination—these tasks don't attract the Lights. But then, they don't attract our own *kitsch*-manufacturers either; we have soap-opera on this side of Niagara Falls. We certainly don't need to import it.

I expected the Oxford anthology of *Canadian Short Stories* to be a great deal better, and it was. The only general fault is not so much a fault as an omission: few of the writers experiment with techniques of prose. Seriousness and subject matter are there, right enough. This omission may reflect the taste of Mr. Robert Weaver, the editor, rather than the literary situation. I don't quarrel with the right of authors to work in a "naturalistic" fashion, intent on actuality, like so many Maupassants. Yet, one longs to see language have an actuality of its own; prose, like poetry, is nourished by the artist's concern with ways of saying things, as well as plot and idea. Nowadays in England, if the novels of C. P. Snow are any indication, there is a wish to abandon this struggle; after Conrad, Proust and Joyce, we are to have H. G. Wells and Galsworthy once more.

Within the rather limited range of technique, a great deal of what they persuade me to think is the real landscape of Canada is described by these stories. "Vacation in La Voiselle," by Irving Layton, renders the sorrows of a French-Canadian Werther in curiously disturbing detail. Ringuet's "The Heritage" produces a poetry of silence, a sense of great solitudes, and W. O. Mitchell's "The Owl and the Bens" is a study of the farouche habits arising from silence and solitude. In "Blind MacNair," Thomas H. Raddall goes about presenting local color in a more literary, and less convincing manner. Outlanders, with their shaky history, are tempted to concoct myths and legends. Here is a ballad-singing duel in an old fishing town, the kind of folksy blarney that Stephen Vincent Benet used to do. You go along with it, but afterwards you feel like a man coming out of a matinee into the glare of afternoon; it was only make-believe.

For plain achievement, I would give the palm to Stephen Leacock's "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias." There comes a point, if one has read a certain amount, when one puts a premium on entertainment. From my reading of Leacock's slapstick literary parodies (in comparison with Beerbohm, for example, he is a mere farceur) I would not have expected him to be able to write a really humorous story. But "The Marine Excursion" is a masterpiece. True, the method is partly Twain's, especially in his *Roughing It,* but Leacock has not abused a borrower's privilege. Beyond his debt he is wildly inventive. The humor depends on your expecting the usual dramatic narrative of a shipwreck and being fooled of your expectation. The plot itself is parody, not merely the style. The probabilities of the fictional world are surpassed by the improbability of Canada. The ex-

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cursion steamer sinks in the lake. Yes, but this has often happened before; besides, the lake is only a few feet deep. Boats set out from shore to rescue the people stuck on the steamer:

> "Hang to it, boys," called the crowd from the steamer's deck, and hang they did.
>
> They were almost exhausted when they got them; men leaning from the steamer threw them ropes and one by one every man was hauled aboard just as the lifeboat sank under their feet.
>
> Saved! by heaven, saved by one of the smartest pieces of rescue work ever seen on the lake.
>
> There's no use describing it; you need to see rescue work of this kind by lifeboats to understand it.

A. J. M. Smith, editor of the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse,* has done a bold and happy thing in packing the verse written before 1900 into less than a quarter of the volume, for only a historian could think it noticeable:

> Old England is eaten by knaves,
> Yet her heart is all right at the core,
> May she ne'er be the mother of slaves,
> Nor a foreign foe land on her shore. . . .
>
> The plodding oxen, dragging creaky wains
> O'er bosky roads, their ancient horns entwine,
> Lick their huge joles, and think of bedded stalls. . . .

And so do I!

However, I have the impression that the French-Canadian poetry of the last century (the anthology is in both languages) is superior to the English. It may simply be that, in a foreign language, clichés are not so apparent. Yet, Lucien Rainier's "Somnium," though it reflects the charnel-house of Baudelaire, represents an individual temperament:

> Parfois, quand le grand sommeil obscurcit ma prunelle,
> je vois paraître en moi, songe mystérieux,
> l'un après l'autre, en long cortège, mes aïeux,
> spectres psalmodiant une plainte éternelle.

Some of the nature pieces have a mysterious sonority. French is a perfect disguise for inanity; what would seem in English mere Bryant, resounds like Lamartine:

> Quand le doux rossignol a quitté les bocages,
> Quand le ciel gris d'automne, amassant ses nuages . . .

The twentieth-century verse is as up-to-date as anyone could wish, and the range, from E. J. Pratt's narrative of the torture of two priests by the Iroquois, to Phyllis Webb's metaphysical lyrics, is considerable. None of the poets loom above their contemporaries as clearly as our

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American masters have loomed above theirs; there is, rather, a level of general ability, as in American poetry today. Of course, one always hopes to see great poetry, but until this comes along I am quite willing to praise ability. At least, ability has the good sense to make way for greatness. Bad poets, on the other hand, are profoundly hostile to the art they have not mastered.

In this collection there are no "movements"; instead, one gets impressions of individual achievement. This makes it difficult to discuss the poems without hopping around like a bee, or a bug. A poem by Jean-Guy Pilon, "L'Etranger d'ici," struck me as particularly fine:

> It était d'un pays de corsaires dévots
> Où l'on prenait l'inconscience pour le dogme
> L'imbécile pour le maître
> Le malade pour le voyant
>
> C'était un pays de luttes inutiles
> Et de ruines magnifiques
> Un pays rongé par la vermine
>
> Quand il a voulu crier sa rage
> On ne le lui a pas permis
>
> C'est à peine si on l'a laissé mourir

And Irving Layton has bravura; there's no doubt in his mind that he's a poet:

> And me happiest when I compose poems.
> Love, power, the huzza of battle
> are something, are much;
> yet a poem includes them . . .

An attack like that is half the secret. The way some poets approach a subject, you'd think they were afraid it might come alive.

Beside the poets I have mentioned, there are others—A. M. Klein, Saint-Denys-Garneau, Gilles Hénault, for example— of at least equal merit. But I will leave the anthology to the purpose for which it was made: to be dipped into by the reader. It should engage most people's taste, in one way or another.

However, one aspect of Canadian writing is not represented by these anthologies, ranging as they do from the commercial skill of *Northern Lights* to the accepted talent of the Oxford poets—that is, a truly avant-garde literature. That the heat and dust of the American scene have their counterpart in Canada, I have no doubt. Perhaps there is room for another anthology, of serious writing by younger novelists and poets. It would have to include some of the writers in the Oxford collections; but also it would include work by the obscure, from whom, in the long run, everything is to be expected.

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DONALD HALL

Invented Countries[1]

IT WAS PERFECTLY SENSIBLE of *Harper's Magazine* to assemble a supplement called "Writing in America," and give employment to a few good writers and critics. But why should it be a book? The original essays are undistinguished, and the additions to the supplement are ludicrous. The President of Rutgers University contributes an introduction in which he tells us that, "Never in all history has there been a time of more crucial importance for humanity," but reassures us by saying that he cannot "believe that the American people have yet gone bankrupt so far as ideas are concerned."

For some reason "the American people" demand their ideas, insofar as they demand ideas at all, third-hand. *Harper's* will publish a collection of essays on American writing, but it will not publish the best writing by the authors under discussion. Any commercial magazine which wanted to publish the good poetry which is written could do so; but apparently no one is interested. Articles about poetry are another matter; after all, they are written in prose. The same public which will buy the books which W. H. Auden, Lionel Trilling and Jacques Barzun—with what evident contempt for their roles and their admirers!—recommend, will buy *Harper's Magazine,* and presumably this book, to know what to think about writing in America; to continue Mason Gross's careful metaphor, these articles keep them intellectually in the black.

Alfred Kazin is quite good about the novel, and Robert Brustein on theater. Kingsley Amis is irrelevant but funny about lecturing in America. C. P. Snow is politic as ever (I would like to suggest that his series of novels, which he calls *Strangers and Brothers,* be renamed *The Trimmer's Companion)* in pretending to decide which side of the Atlantic is better for the writer. Articles on "The Writer and Hollywood" and "The Lost Art of Writing for Television" are as familiar as John Fischer on editing. The article about poetry is a special disappointment. Stanley Kunitz has written a dialogue between a student poet and a grown-up one, in which every o.k. name gets predictably dropped. The necessity for completeness leads Mr. Kunitz into sentences like, "Nor have I mentioned three fine women poets—forgive that stupid category!—Louise Bogan, Leonie Adams, and Elizabeth Bishop." The word "fine" is the only critical word on this occasion. The article brings up a curious question: Mr. Kunitz has elsewhere

[1] WRITING IN AMERICA, ed. by *John Fischer* and *Robert B. Silvers.* Rutgers University Press. $3.95. THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION, from *The Times Literary Supplement.* Atheneum. $4.50. A MIRROR FOR ANGLO-SAXONS, by *Martin Green.* Harper. $3.50.

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written criticism which was tough-minded and which avoided all appearance of disingenuousness; then why does he reserve his failure for this most public occasion? It's my opinion that many good writers, when they try to make a buck from a commercial magazine, unconsciously adjust themselves to what they consider the level of the medium. They perpetrate a sort of regime writing. How else does one account for all those people who are amiable and genteel in the weekly reviews, and nasty and scrupulous in the quarterlies?

I am grateful to Mr. Kunitz, however, for a pair of mistakes which give me a point. I have long believed that American opinions about English literature, and English about American, were the products more of prejudice than of familiarity. And the prejudice can work either way. In English Departments one constantly meets little men who assume that whatever the English say and do will always be better than what we say and do. One also meets automatic Anglophobes, and they are usually brighter. (I have heard of one poet who said, after he had been in England briefly, "We've got more good poets in Seattle!") Now Kunitz belongs, in some degree, to this latter category. But how much does he know about what happens in England? His young student says he doesn't know many of the newer English poets, but mentions John Betjeman as one. There is no indication that Kunitz intended irony, and the old poet makes no correction. But to call John Betjeman "newer" is a bit peculiar, since his first book was published nearly thirty years ago, and since he published a book in America at least as far back as 1947.

The other poet whom the young man mentions is Philip Larkin (he doesn't seem to know of Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, Charles Tomlinson, Donald Davie, Geoffrey Hill, etc.) and he proceeds to quote him. Then the older poet quotes a stanza from Theodore Roethke to show how much more vitality we Americans have. This comparison is the most common version of the America/England myth in both countries, and most literary men seem willing to accept it. But I could make the opposite point (with an equal absurdity!) if I compared Dylan Thomas with Marianne Moore. These comparisons are pointless critically, and I suggest that they fulfill some extra-literary need. And I feel sure of my ground, when I argue that Kunitz is not very familiar with Philip Larkin, when I see that he calls him Peter Larkin.

The most attractive essay here is Elizabeth Hardwick's attack on American book reviewing. (In another of the book's useless additions to the supplement, Cass Canfield of Harper's takes her to task for—I have no other phrase for it—rocking the boat.) I won't recount it, or quote the malice which she somehow makes adorable, but I will use her for another illustration. She uses the *Times Literary Supplement* as a stick with which to beat the New York Times Book Review. She quotes Dwight MacDonald who says that the *TLS* "seems to be edited and read by people who know what they are and what interests them."

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Statements like this make me think of the little match girl; I wonder how she phrased to herself the overwhelming prosperity she watched through the window. The *TLS* is generally pretentious and public school; it is one of the many voices of a social structure that decayed some time ago, a faint voice which speaks out of vicarages and second-rate clubs, wheezily insisting on its health and the virtues of a good accent. This conservatism defends no system of ideas; it defends a decadent manner and a lost position. It is nostalgic and sentimental.

Not that the *TLS* is always bad. I believe that G. S. Fraser has reviewed much of the poetry in the last few years, and there are worse critics. But there are much better things in other papers: the *Observer* and the *New Statesman,* as Miss Hardwick remarks, and the *Spectator.* The best reviewers of literature in England are John Wain, A. Alvarez, Frank Kermode and V. S. Pritchett. Alvarez publishes in the *Statesman* and the *Observer,* Pritchett mostly in the *Statesman,* Wain in the *Observer* and the *Spectator,* and Kermode in the *Spectator* and *Encounter.* Outside of them, reviewing is as dead in England as it is here. And England lacks the outspoken quarterlies, so that in general there is a greater spirit of accommodation. The relative intransigence of the American intellectual is a refreshment, after a diet of British weeklies. Miss Hardwick actually praises the English *Sunday Times,* which is surely inferior to our own.

If you want to see how bad the *TLS* can be, look at *The American Imagination.* This is another supplement turned into a book, and the *Harper's* collection is splendid by contrast. Some of the contributors appear to be Americans, and the anonymous list of contributors surely includes some men who have not contributed to the *TLS* before, but the mixture is strangely similar to the ordinary weekly issue. There is one good essay, and a number of others with an idea or two, but the issue is full of old Tory condescension about America, and it is full of accommodating nonsense. But I won't take up my space with examples: I have already put this collection to task once, in the *New Statesman,* and I do not think it decent to hang the same thief twice. Let me only say that the American imagination accounts for both "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should" and Wallace Stevens.

Intelligent Americans invent two Englands; one is England the stable society, with a class which reads books responsibly and gives the writer an audience. The other England is the bad one: England the superego, restrictive of feeling, repressive of originality, and incurably philistine. Both versions of England really concern ourselves; they are concerned with what we dislike or like about America, and they indicate our politics and our attitude toward authority. Typically the Anglophobe American turns to France. James Schuyler, in a note in *The New American Poetry,* mentions "the campus dry-heads who wishfully descend tum-ti-tumming from Yeats out of Graves with a big kiss for Mother England . . ." and says that, "the best American writing

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is French rather than English oriented." The curious thing about statements like this one—and its contrary, which can be found at any English Department cocktail party—is that they are so blindly either/or. Can anyone deny that Henry James and T. S. Eliot are profoundly Anglophile and concerned with England, *or* that they have been enormously affected by French literature?

Englishmen invent a number of Americas. One version, which thinks it is friendly but is really condescending, congratulates America on its vitality; Americans are lovely people who like bright colors and loud music; American musicals are our greatest contribution to art! Others see a fascist America, a decadent America, an America which would like to come into the Commonwealth, an America largely composed of Italians and Negroes, and—most importantly among young writers—an America which is classless and democratic and free of the incumbrances of the past: intellectually and morally open. None of these Americas resemble the one I have lived in.

Martin Green is an Englishman who came to America after Cambridge, who has used America in his battle with England, and who records the struggle in *A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons.* The state, as Plato said, is the model of the man. Green turns England and America into people; he talks of national "images," and concerns himself with *types* of Americans and Englishmen. The battle is waged entirely within himself, and I feel that neither his England nor his America exist anywhere else.

This America is a flattering portrait, if a bad likeness, but it has its unforgiveable absurdities; the author whom Green particularly inflates is J. D. Salinger, and he compares him with Tolstoy. Green writes poorly and thinks superficially most of the time. He is another cultural analyst, the product of self-conscious mass-society. He is full of terms like "highbrow," "middlebrow" and "lowbrow," and as you might expect he opts for middlebrow. He is set against the English "gentleman," and wants to replace him by the "decent man," whom he constructs from the unlikely and uncomfortable foursome of F. R. Leavis, George Orwell, D. H. Lawrence and Kingsley Amis. (The English gentleman, by the way, is sitting on his shooting stick watching the whole show, a copy of the *TLS* in hand for swatting flies; he applauds politely, says, "Well done, Green," and puts him up for his club. The English gentleman enjoys being attacked, a pleasure perhaps allied to *le vice anglais,* and thereby nullifies opposition.)

The "decent man," as it happens, is rather grim:

> There is also something lower middle class about this type; it never aims at elegance or magnificence of the aristocratic kind, or Bohemian irresponsibility or indecent exposure, or ruthless theorizing; always at decency, marriage, domesticity, filial and parental duties. It is all-around responsible, to class, country, civilization, the four-square citizen and human being. . . .

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> Decency means cleanliness, in the most literal sense. . . .
>
> . . . the essential Englishman . . . is small, neat . . . friendly-jeering in tone, hostile to all elaborateness or eccentricity, unwilling to talk his emotions . . . creating around him the atmosphere of decency, kindliness, cleanliness; . . .

One is left with the impression that the upper classes have stopped taking baths. The Puritanism is thorough. One is forced to remember that Cromwell's men destroyed works of art as well as relics. Green's program would expel most poets from the Kingdom, and would substitute one class conformity for another.

Sometimes I think that his program is winning the day in England. As good a poet as Philip Larkin reviewed John Betjeman's *Summoned by Bells* as if it answered Eliot's assertion that modern poetry to be good must be difficult. Betjeman's Tory sentimentality seems only to strengthen Eliot's point. Characteristic denunciations of Ezra Pound attack his erudition and his eccentricity. Wallace Stevens is occasionally ridiculed for his Frenchfied vocabulary. Critics exalt a hack poet like D. J. Enright over a skilled artist like Charles Tomlinson because "life" is more important than "art."

Yet one must realize the burdens which a dying system of social class imposes. It is easy to see how eccentricity and aestheticism can become attributes of a leisure class and concomitants of repression. And it is easy to see how the obsession with social class must influence literary judgment. There is at least some luck in being born American. We carry less baggage with us. The American intellectual is unconnected with his society; he is solitary and specialized and he is often less than satisfactory. But whether he is a Marxist or a mediaevalist, he is more able to be aware of the sources of his opinions.

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